

Network to Work Meeting

November 2018

RESOURCE DOCUMENT – *WORKPLACE ETIQUETTE*

The Rights and Wrongs of Workplace Etiquette

Your workplace behavior can strongly affect the way a colleague, boss, customer or client views you as a professional. Good etiquette builds positive and lasting relationships, and having manners around your coworkers and supervisors can make the difference when it's time for promotions or special assignments.

Poor etiquette on the other hand can damage your reputation and have a negative impact your workplace success. Coworkers can talk up a kind, respectful peer, or they can talk down one with bad manners, limiting growth and opportunities. Changing a negative opinion is much more difficult than maintaining a good one.

So whether you are starting a new job or you've been working at the same job for years, it's never too late to refresh your understanding of workplace etiquette. Here are some important pointers to remember.

1. **Respect your Coworkers' Privacy and Possessions.** Don't peer over a coworker's cubicle to grab his or her attention. Always act as if your peers are guarded by doors and make a knock-knock sound and motion before you enter one's desk area. If you see that he or she is busy, either drop a note on the desk and leave, or go back to your own cubicle and send an email. This shows respect for his or her time.

Also, steer clear of your peers' possessions, including their emails, text messages, snail mail, or paper on the printer or a desk. If your name isn't on it, don't read it, touch it, or share it. Ask before you borrow anything, and if you do, be sure to return it as soon as possible. Nothing raises the ire of your coworkers quicker than borrowing—and losing—their property without their permission.

2. **Protect your own Privacy:** Remember that people on all sides of one's cubicle can hear whatever you are saying, even in a normal voice. If you need to conduct a private business related conversation, borrow a vacant office or conference room. Personal conversations are best taken outside, in a break room, or other private space; not only does this safeguard the confidentiality of your private conversations, but it also demonstrates mindfulness about not disrupting your co-workers while they are working.

3. **Watch your Mouth.** In the workplace you will likely be surrounded by people of all faiths, backgrounds, and moral codes of conduct. Given this diversity, watch your language and edit out swear words, demeaning phrases, and other rude or offensive remarks. Also, avoid asking personal questions such as, "are you pregnant?" or "How much did you pay for that?" If your co-worker wants you to know, she or he will tell you. Until then, stay quiet.

4. **Keep your Sounds Down.** Be aware of how noise travels in an office space that is open or has cubicles. Even the softest music can be heard in surrounding areas. If you like to listen to music while you work, use headphones or earbuds. Resist the urge to hum or tap your fingers, or you may have coworkers gritting their teeth. Don't use the speakerphone unless others need to be in on the conversation.

Furthermore, raising your voice while you're talking - even if due to passion, not anger - is a distraction to your peers. As with disruptive personal conversations, this tells your coworkers that you have little regard for their work, which is no way to make work friends. If you need to speak loud, make your way to a conference room or another area of the workplace.

5. **Keep it Clean.**

Your Workspace:

Keep your workspace neat and clean. Even if your cubicle has "walls," it is still open to anyone who walks by. No one likes to work with a slob, especially when it spills over into community space. Furthermore, remember this when you decorate your space. Coworkers, bosses, and the cleaning crew will all be able to see what you have on display. Finally, be sure to clean up after yourself in shared spaces.

Ultimately, a messy area is a reflection of you and may likely become an issue when it's time for a review or job promotion.

The Kitchen:

Many an etiquette faux pas occurs in the office kitchen. This includes eating a co-worker's lunch, failing to throw out food you've kept too long in the refrigerator, and failing to clean up after yourself.

6. **Avoid Distracting Smells and Grooming Habits.** Be mindful of other people's smell sensibilities and possible allergies. Most workers can remember a time when someone next to them waltzed in wearing too much perfume or not enough deodorant. Use fragrance sparingly, if at all. You don't want to cause someone to have a coughing or sneezing attack, or worse, go into respiratory distress. Also, don't put scented candles or air fresheners in your cubicle.

Another issue relates to the smell of your food. Avoid bringing smelly foods to work, and if you must eat at your desk, make sure it doesn't have strong smells that can bother those around you.

Also, when working in a cubicle or open area, be mindful that everyone who walks by can see what you're doing. Therefore, don't conduct too much personal grooming in your cubicle. This includes anything you wouldn't do while standing in front of a group of people, such as flossing your teeth, putting on makeup or plucking your eyebrows. Take care of personal hygiene before you leave home or in the restroom.

7. **In Meetings, be Respectful of Others; Take Turns Speaking Without Interrupting.**

Allow each person to complete a thought, and interject only when you have something constructive to say. This shows your respect for others and your appreciation for being part of a team.

8. **Don't Get Involved in Office Gossip about Other Employees or the Company.** Even if hanging out with coworkers on personal time, think of something else to discuss. You never know what will come back to haunt you, and there is no benefit to being seen as the office gossip.

9. **Give Credit and Accept Blame.** Claiming someone else's ideas or accomplishments as your own can ruin your reputation. Make sure that if a project, task or activity comes up at a meeting or social event, you give credit to the correct person. If a supervisor mistakenly thinks it is your idea, set the record straight, no matter how tempting it may be to let her or him continue thinking you are brilliant.

By the same token, never blame anyone else for your mistakes. This will only create animosity. Owning your mistakes and trying to correct them demonstrates professionalism. Everyone makes mistakes, just try not to make the same one more than once.

10. **Be Friendly but Don't Overshare.**

The office is like a second home to most people who work, so it often becomes a comfortable environment that feels like a sanctuary where you can let your hair down. Be careful. As much as your coworkers and supervisor may seem like family, they're not. In fact, sharing too much information with the people you work with can be detrimental to your success at work.

The people you work with don't need a blow-by-blow account of your life. It's none of their business and leaves you too exposed for a business environment. Stop and think about your purpose in sharing; is it something you really want these people to know?

11. **If you are Sick, Stay Home.**

When you have a virus that is contagious, it's rude to take it to the office. Not only will you get less work done, you are spreading your germs that can make other people miserable. Stay home and take care of yourself so you can get back to work and be more productive.

12. **Refrain from Inappropriate Workplace Discussion Topics, such as:**

- *Complaints about your Boss:* Discussing your thoughts about your boss with other people in the office is one of the worst things you can do. Not only might someone slip up and repeat what you said, other people may overhear you.
- *Complaints about a Coworker Who Isn't There:* While there may be plenty you can say about your coworkers, remember that there is probably some scathing thing they can say about you!
- *Complaints about Being Given Tasks outside of your Job Description:* Embrace the changes with a smile, and consider it a compliment that someone has enough confidence in you to add to your list of duties.
- *Gossip and Rumors:* If the temptation to spread the latest rumor overwhelms you, walk away from those who are starting it. You know who the office big mouths are, and chances are, so do your supervisors. Be nice to them but don't become one of them.

- *Politics or Religion:* People are passionate about both subjects, and heated debates can cause friction among people who need to get along to accomplish work related goals. Find something else to discuss.

13. **Maintain Good Relationships.** You don't have to be best friends with the people you work closely with, but it is important to maintain a good professional relationship with him or her. A friendly greeting when you arrive at the office and an occasional smile will help.

14. **Act with Integrity:**

- Collaborate. Nothing good was created in a vacuum.
- Do your own work, and don't try to "delegate" it away.
- Be honest and respectful. Nobody wants to work with a liar. And when criticism must be shared, say it kindly and in private.
- Be respectful of other people's time. Whether it's a scheduled meeting or getting a task done, time sensitivity is important. Sometimes things will go awry, and if that happens, give folks a heads up about the delay.
- Say thank you. Everyone wants to feel valued, and an honest expression of gratitude can go a long way.

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