

Network to Work Meeting

October 2021

RESOURCE DOCUMENT – *WORKPLACE ETIQUETTE*

Workplace Etiquette

Work etiquette is a standard that controls the social behavior people expect to see in the workplace. It covers a wide range of aspects among employees including communication, body language, behavior and technology use, among others.

Basically, workplace etiquette is about how you conduct yourself around coworkers, supervisors and bosses, customers and client partners, and customers. It boils down to treating others with respect, to be aware of everyone present and to be polite overall.

Etiquette makes your work with your co-worker easier for you and more pleasant for your fellow colleagues. When someone interrupts you while talking, arrives late for a meeting, or uses inappropriate language, you begin to wonder how an individual could be so disrespectful. All of these are nothing but workplace etiquette violations.

There are some components of workplace etiquette that depend on the office personality. However, specific proper workplace etiquette rules apply to almost every business.

Important Workplace Etiquette Rules

1. Be Respectful To Your Coworkers

All of your colleagues deserve respect, even though they are not always respectful towards you. It's essential to learn to acknowledge other people's religious views, cultural diversity, political opinions, sexual preference and gender identity. You don't have to agree with them all the time, but maintaining respect is proper etiquette.

When engaging in conversation, take turns and don't interrupt. Encourage each person to complete a thought and engage in discussion. Furthermore, honor the time and schedules of others; before starting a conversation, make sure that they have the time or want to talk at that moment.

When attending a meeting, make sure you arrive on time or better, arrive early. Also, ignore personal calls during a meeting. Ideally turn off your cell phone. This shows respect and consideration for others in the meeting and lets them know that they can count on you.

Finally, don't engage in gossip or share rumors about other staff or the business in the office. Keep a safe distance between the professional and personal life of yourself and others too. When you're on personal time, hanging out with colleagues, talk of something light and positive rather than office gossip.

2. Filter Your Speech

A workplace is often a challenging, stressful environment. Each worker has different aspirations, attitudes, personalities and work styles. Even though they are working together towards one common goal, these differences may result in clashes.

One easy way that you can maintain a friendly and productive workplace is by measuring your words. Think before you speak. Respect others' perspectives and honor workplace diversity. Take care not to be offensive in email communications, and never make arguments personal. Don't forget to apologize in words, whenever required.

3. Maintain Virtual Office Etiquette

Virtual meetings have become a part of our daily work routine. It is a whole another story compared to in-person meetings. Here are six simple things that you need to follow to maintain the perfect virtual workplace etiquette.

- a. Take a few minutes to get appropriately dressed and brush your hair before starting your day. That's the first step to being productive while working remotely.
- b. When you join a virtual team meeting, speak up when you are asked to. Do not keep silent, but make sure not to interrupt when someone else is talking.
- c. Use attentive body language if you're using your webcam. Sit up straight, don't make weird gestures, and don't let your eyes wander too far.
- d. Mute your microphone when you are not talking as it will help avoid noises.
- e. Make sure your work setup is professional. A messy room or background, a screaming child or a barking dog can be distracting. Smoking on camera is also unprofessional.
- f. Make proper eye contact in the camera.

4. Stay Accountable

Workers should take responsibility for their feelings, words, and behavior, especially when they have made a mistake. Such personal accountability is closely related to honesty and integrity. It speaks to your character, helps you maintain a good reputation, and builds better workplace relationships.

5. Understand Teamwork

Proper business etiquette is essential to building and sustaining a team of employees who trust, appreciate, and value each other. If one person does not do his portion of the job, the other members of the team are compelled to take up the slack and feel the stress. This will likely create resentment among coworkers, not to mention costly losses in productivity.

Respectful Workplace Expression – Terms of Endearment

Imagine this scenario. You're having a typical workday doing your routine job responsibilities. Then, one of your colleagues who you don't know very well asks for help with the copy machine. As a gesture of gratitude, they respond by saying "thanks, honey." How would that make you feel?

For most individuals in the workplace, terms of endearment like "honey", "sweetie", "hon", "darling", etc. make them feel uncomfortable or offended. Others may chalk it up to regional or generational differences. This dilemma begs the question: are terms of endearment a form of workplace harassment? Or are they just a harmless way to express affection? Here's what experts on workplace etiquette, ethics and labor law have to say.

Regardless of gender or the intent, many people find that terms of endearment are not appropriate for work. Most feel they should be reserved to express affection for a partner, friend or family member – and the experts agree. Rachel Holland, an authority on work etiquette and ethics, advises against using any terms of endearment in a professional setting.

Labor law attorney, Karen Michael, is of the same mind. **Not only can terms of endearment in the office show a lack of respect and condescension, but they can also have potential legal implications if they are deemed workplace harassment.** Instead, your safest bet is to call your colleagues by their first name and if you don't know it, just ask.

The U.S. Department of Interior, Office of Civil Rights puts it best: **"Terms of endearment, such as calling a co-worker "honey", "dear", "sweetheart", or some similar expression may constitute sexual harassment or discrimination. The effect [of the words] is the primary issue rather than the intent. Even if the person 'means nothing to you' or you have 'used the term for years', you should be aware that such expressions are inappropriate."**

To help build positive and respectful workplace relationships with your colleagues and to avoid possible workplace harassment claims, avoid terms of endearment. Other off-limit topics include: a) your colleague's clothing, behavior, or body; and b) yours or your colleague's romantic relationships

If you're not sure if something you want to say would be offensive to others or considered workplace harassment, it's best to keep it to yourself. You could also use this similar rule of thumb: **if you wouldn't say something to a coworker in front of your spouse or significant other, it's probably better left unsaid.**

Respectful Workplace Expression - Gender Identity

Workplace etiquette is about showing respect in the workplace. Nothing may be more personal than the way in which people refer to us through our name and pronouns. Using a person's chosen name and desired pronouns is a form of mutual respect and basic courtesy.

In the workplace, employees usually have the option of articulating their **preferred name**, and the way they articulate this may vary -- formally vs. informally, in email vs. in-person meetings, on name badges and business cards, etc. For example, you may know someone with a birth name like Robert John Smith who prefers to be called RJ. Or someone who appears to be male but prefers to go by a female-sounding name such as Sarah.

But what about **pronouns**?

Gender pronouns (such as "he/him/his", "she/her/hers" and "they/them/theirs") are the way that we constantly refer to each other's gender identity - except we often don't think a whole lot about them. Usually we interpret or "read" a person's gender based on their outward appearance and expression, and "assign" a pronoun based on our gender assumptions. But our reading may not be a correct interpretation of the gender with which this person identifies.

For most people their birth-assigned sex, their gender identity, their gender expression and how everyone else interprets their gender falls into alignment. However, this is not true for everyone. A culture that readily asks or provides pronouns is one committed to reducing the risk of disrespect or embarrassment for both parties.

Gender assumptions are made and fostered from birth – boy babies are dressed in blue, while girls are swaddled in pink; there are countless cultural and social norms like this that can be difficult to unlearn. We see someone who looks or dresses a particular way and assign a gender to them.

Gender identity, however, is internal – an internal *sense* of one's gender. Many people identify as "**cisgender**" (i.e., male or female) because to them, their gender matches what was assigned at birth. Others are "**non-binary**" and don't identify along the binary of either male or female (e.g. "him" or "her"). Some people identify as both masculine and feminine, or neither. A genderfluid, genderqueer or non-binary identified person may prefer a gender-neutral pronoun such as the "they / them / theirs" (e.g. "I know Tom. They work in the Accounting Department").

As gender identity is internal, we can't necessarily know a person's correct gender pronoun by looking at them and relying on traditional gender assumptions.

The concept of gender identity, gender fluidity and changing personal pronouns can be difficult for some to grasp and get used to, but this concept is rapidly shaping the workplace landscape. This means learning to move past our gender assumptions.

Everyone deserves to have their self-ascribed name and pronouns respected in the workplace; the experience of being misgendered can be hurtful, angering, and even distracting. Accidentally misgendering someone can be embarrassing for both parties, creating tension and leading to communication breakdowns across teams and with customers. Therefore, more and more people of all gender identities are choosing to clarify their pronouns in an email signature, on a name tag, etc. These cues are intended to help everyone in the workplace to be more conscious and intentional regarding our assumptions and about how we communicate with one another.

Adapted from:

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