

Network to Work Meeting – September 2022

RESOURCE DOCUMENT – *PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT*

About Professional Conduct

What is Professional Conduct?

Professional conduct is the way you present yourself in professional situations. It is all about showing respect for your work and your employer. It is reflected in how you speak and interact with others, in your tone and attitude, in how you dress, and how you approach your work. When you demonstrate professional, respectful conduct in the workplace, you and your work will be taken more seriously and you will be seen as someone with the knowledge and self-control to be good at their job. On the flip side, disrespectful conduct and rudeness will lose you the trust of others.

The Importance of Respect in the Workplace

It is important to always treat people as you want to be treated—with respect. Despite different backgrounds, experiences, and personalities, you have much in common with everyone you work with – your colleagues, customers, superiors. You each have rights, opinions, wishes and experience to offer. You have competence, and you also make mistakes. You also have similar concerns and insecurities, and you share the common goal of wanting to perform your jobs successfully.

When you demonstrate respectful professional conduct towards those you work with, you are helping to create a healthy work environment and culture that encourages productivity and growth. You are treating people with dignity and appreciation, despite differences. You are listening to the opinion of others and speaking with kindness, courtesy and politeness. As a result, teamwork is fostered, productivity increases, others feel valued and respected, and the organization has a strong foundation for success. People who feel respected show respect to others.

The Role of Stress

The ability to conduct oneself professionally and respectfully can be significantly impacted by the stress one feels. And there is no denying that we are currently living in a time of great anxiety. For a long time we have all faced extreme amounts of stress due to external factors such as the pandemic, climate change, economic volatility, politics, etc. Furthermore, things made worse by the

pandemic - burnout, emotional exhaustion, heavy workloads, feelings of insecurity – are common triggers for rude behavior.

An additional stressor is the fact that the workplace today is in a state of great flux. Many workers who have been working remotely during the pandemic are having their positions converted permanently into work from home positions. Others are now being asked to return to the workplace and will need to readjust to working in person with others.

Living in a state of stress and anxiety can make one less aware of their conduct towards others. Rudeness becomes more prevalent, and it is contagious. If one experiences uncivil behavior, they are more likely to demonstrate it. This occurs even if someone doesn't mean to be rude. Consequently, disrespectful behavior has become more frequent, communication with others has deteriorated and workplace conduct has suffered.

The Impact of Virtual Relationships

With so many people working remotely and from home due to the pandemic, it has become necessary for diverse teams to come together and collaborate in virtual meetings. Unfortunately, virtual spaces such as Zoom meetings and chatrooms are settings that seem to invite disrespectful behavior. Physical distance makes us feel separated from one another and it is easier to be uncivil. Furthermore, there are often few consequences for those who behave badly.

Incivility

This incivility damages performance and team effectiveness. Disrespectful, unprofessional conduct isn't just annoying or upsetting, but it can negatively impact the workplace performance of its recipient. The recipient may also experience an impact to their mental health, especially if the intent of the other person is unclear.

Sometimes incivility is a reflection of personal bias directed toward women, racial minorities, LGBTQ employees and others with marginalized identities. It takes the form of subtle slights, interruptions, snide remarks, over talk and general disregard. These groups experience workplace rudeness with the greatest frequency.

Other times no harm is intended and the "bad actor" may not even notice the impact of their conduct, especially if it is a consequence of someone having a tough or stressful day.

How to Show Professional Conduct / Respect

As you have read above, there are many factors that can result in unprofessional workplace conduct, rudeness and poor communication. It is crucial, therefore, for you to be self-aware of how you're dealing with your own stressors, and to pay close attention to your actions. Recognize that, *"I may not be showing up as my best self. Therefore I need to take extra care with my communications and how I'm connecting with people."*

Furthermore, be mindful and empathetic to the fact that others are likely dealing with their own stressors and are worthy of your consideration.

So what does professional conduct look like? Here are important behaviors for you to model in your professional interactions.

- **Treating people with dignity and appreciation, despite differences.**
- **Use a respectful and kind tone of voice. Speak with kindness, courtesy and politeness**
- **Be aware of your body language, demeanor and expression** in all of your professional interactions. People hear what you're really saying in addition to listening to your words.
- **Listen closely and carefully** to others as they speak. Give them time to share their opinions and ideas.
- **Ask questions** to make sure you understand another's point of view.
- **Don't yell or raise your voice at anyone.** Nothing productive comes out of a screaming match. Cool off, walk away, close the door, etc. but don't yell.
- **Don't interrupt or talk over another person who is talking.**
Let others finish speaking without interrupting. This is basic etiquette, no matter the situation. *When you cut someone off to express your own opinion, you send a message that you think your opinion matters more, or that you're completely uninterested in hearing what they have to say.*

If you have a thought while someone is talking, write it down and stay silent until the person has finished talking. Then offer your thoughts. Writing down what you want to say not only reminds you what you were going to say, it helps you to remain focused on what the other person is saying rather than simply waiting to respond.

In a meeting, raise your hand and wait to be called upon. This is especially important in a Zoom meeting if you cannot see on your screen the faces of everyone participating.

Likewise, in an in-person workplace setting, if you need to talk to a coworker, but you can see they are busy—don't interrupt them. Wait until they aren't typing, on the phone, or speaking to someone else. You can always send them a message and ask them to chat with you when they have a few minutes.

- **Do not mutter under your breath or mumble** while meeting with others.
- **Never insult, use name-calling, disparage, or belittle** people or their ideas.
- **Do not criticize, judge, demean, or patronize** another. Repeating such actions can constitute bullying.
- **Avoid all behaviors that constitute harassment, sexual harassment, or discrimination.**
- **Thank others** for their help.
- **Notice and acknowledge another's hard work.**
- **Dress appropriately.**

As many offices have a “business casual” or “casual” dress code, it can be tempting to wear the most casual look you can get away with. However, the best thing to do is dress up one notch from the office norm. Furthermore, if you regularly meet with clients or prospective clients, make sure you dress in more formal business attire. This will help you to be taken seriously. Mirroring your boss's style or level of formality will help to ensure you're dressing appropriately.

Sources:

“How to handle rude emails, constant messages and micromanaging bosses while working remotely.” by Jennifer Liu. CNBC.com. Updated January 18, 2020. <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/06/17/communication-and-etiquette-tips-for-the-virtual-workplace.html>

“5 Ways to Reduce Rudeness in the Remote Workplace”, by Dana Kabat-Farr and Remi Labelle-Deraspe. Harvard Business Review. August 19, 2021. <https://hbr.org/2021/08/5-ways-to-reduce-rudeness-in-the-remote-workplace>

“We finally have proof that remote working is making people ruder”, Wired.co, September 17, 2021. <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/remote-working-rude-colleagues>

“How to Demonstrate Respect in the Workplace”, by Susan M. Heathfield, The Balance Careers, updated February 17, 2021. <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/how-to-demonstrate-respect-in-the-workplace-1919376>

“10 Key Tips for Proper Etiquette at Work”, by Indeed Editorial Team, Indeed.com, Updated December 3, 2021. <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/etiquette-at-work>

“Respect in the Workplace: How to Show Respect and Promote It”, by Indeed Editorial Team, Updated August 22, 2022.