

## **Skills to Improve Your Workplace Etiquette**

### **Making Positive Impressions**

How you present yourself to others in the business world speaks volumes. People often form first impressions about others within seconds of first meeting them therefore it is crucial to ensure you are properly prepared to present yourself as a professional.

Here are some important tips towards making a good impression:

- Stand straight, make eye contact, turn towards people when they are speaking, and genuinely smile at people.
- Follow your office dress code, perhaps dressing a step above the norm for your office.
- Your briefcase or bag and the things you carry in them say something about you. Messy items may detract from the image you would like to present.
- When meeting someone for the first time, be sure to shake hands palm to palm with a gentle firmness.
- Be alert. Sleepiness looks bad in the workplace.
- Kindness and courtesy count!
- Arrive early to work each day.

### **People**

How you treat people says a lot about you.

- Learn names and learn them quickly. A good tip for remembering names is to use a person's name three times within your first conversation with them.
- Also, write names down and keep business cards. People know when you don't know their names and may interpret this as a sign that you don't value them.
- Don't make value judgments on people's importance in the workplace. Talk to the maintenance staff members and to the people who perform many of the administrative support functions. These people deserve your respect!
- Self-assess: Think about how you treat your supervisor(s), peers, and subordinates. Would the differences in the relationships, if seen by others, cast you in an unfavorable light? If so, find where the imbalance exists, and start the process of reworking the relationship dynamic.

- What you share with others about your personal life is your choice, but be careful. Things can come back to haunt you. Don't ask others to share their personal lives with you. This makes many people uncomfortable in the work space.
- Respect people's personal space. This may be very different than your own.

### **Communicating**

It's sometimes not what you say, but how you say it that counts!

- Return phone calls and emails within 24 hours – even if only to say that you will provide requested information at a later date.
- Ask before putting someone on speakerphone.
- Personalize your voice mail – there's nothing worse than just hearing a phone number on someone's voice mail and not knowing if you are leaving a message with the correct person. People may not even leave messages.
- Emails at work should be grammatically correct and free of spelling errors. They should not be treated like personal email.
- When emailing, use the subject box, and make sure it directly relates to what you are writing. This ensures ease in finding it later and a potentially faster response.
- Never say in an email anything you wouldn't say to someone's face.
- Underlining, italicizing, bolding, coloring, and changing font size can make a mild email message seem overly strong or aggressive.

### **Meetings**

This can easily be the most intimidating part of starting a new job. The environment of a meeting requires some careful navigation to maintain your professional image, whether the meetings are one-on-one, with several colleagues or with external clients.

- For a meeting in someone's office, don't arrive more than five minutes early, as they may be prepping for your meeting, another meeting later that day, or trying to get other work done. You may make them uncomfortable, and that is not a good way to begin your meeting.
- Don't arrive late...ever. If you are going to be late, try to let someone know so that people are not sitting around waiting for you. Don't forget that being on time for a meeting means arriving 5 minutes early – for an interview, arrive 10 minutes early.
- When a meeting runs late and you need to be somewhere else, always be prepared to explain where you need to be (understanding that the value of where you need to be will likely be judged).

- Do not interrupt people. This is a bad habit to start and a tough one to end.
- There is a time and place for confrontation, and a meeting is almost never that place. You will embarrass and anger other people, and you will look bad for doing it. Give people time and space outside of meetings to reflect on issues that need to be dealt with.

### **Work Space**

You may spend more waking hours in work spaces than in your home space so:

- Keep the space professional and neat with appropriate personal touches! People will see the space and consider it a reflection of you.
- Whether it is a cubicle or office, respect others' space. Don't just walk in; knock or make your presence gently known. Don't assume acknowledgement of your presence is an invitation to sit down; wait until you are invited to do so.
- Don't interrupt people on the phone, and don't try to communicate with them verbally or with sign language. You could damage an important phone call.
- Limit personal calls, especially if you work in a space that lacks a door.
- Learn when and where it is appropriate to use your cell phone in your office.
- Food consumption should generally be regulated. Smells and noise from food can be distracting to others trying to work.

### **International Business Etiquette**

As the global market grows, the need to understand multiple international standards of business etiquette grows. Research the country you will be working in or visiting; note the proper etiquette, culture and customs for that country. There are, however, a few key things to keep in mind when conducting business internationally:

- Knowing the language makes an excellent impression on the people you are doing business with. Barely knowing the language, but feigning fluency, could really harm the work you are trying to accomplish.
- Be mindful of time zones. You don't want to wake someone up on their cell phone or call someone with an unreasonable deadline or concern at an awkward time of day for them.
- As there is no standard global work day, you should keep in mind that work hours vary from country to country. This is important when scheduling meetings or conference calls.
- Know the holidays that will be observed, and be respectful of the time surrounding the holidays, as people may be less available.

- Meals can be extremely crucial in making a positive international business etiquette impression. The customs that are followed when dining are often very important, and mistakes in this area could be costly. Knowing the etiquette well in advance should allow you to relax and enjoy what could be an amazing new experience!
- Vigilantly observe the corporate culture in which you work, and be aware that change will happen. Your eyes and ears are your best resource in this learning process!

\* <http://www.careereducation.columbia.edu/resources/tipsheets/skills-business-etiquette>