

## Chapter 1

# Displaying Good Manners at Work

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Developing good etiquette on the job
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**B**usiness etiquette is vitally important for creating a harmonious work environment and for representing your company in the best manner possible. Although many people consider their technical skills and intelligence to be their most important job qualifications, many employers consider the ability to get along well with colleagues and clients even more important. Being well mannered means two things above all else: respecting others, and treating people with courtesy and kindness.

Whether your company is a highly caffeinated startup, a small gift boutique, or a large law firm, good manners at work are important because they emphasize your willingness to control your behavior for the benefit of others. I introduce you to the basics of business etiquette in this chapter.

## *Conducting Yourself with Class*

As a representative of your company, you stand not only for yourself, but also for the company as a whole. If you are poised, courteous, and respectful to your company's clients, they will extend their approving judgment to other employees of your company. If you are inconsiderate, insolent, and rude to your company's clients, you will be out of a job soon.

Acting with grace and tact is also crucial within your workplace. In the following sections, I introduce you to three important concepts: making a positive impression on your colleagues, working well in a diverse environment, and dressing appropriately.

## *Making a good impression*



Your considerate behavior in the office and with clients makes a big impression; it's instantly recognizable and beneficial to both you and to your company. When a courteous employee works with others, including his peers, staff, and superiors, his grace lends an air of professionalism to the workplace that others emulate and that employers reward.

Being a well-mannered business professional is harder than memorizing a bunch of stuffy rules. The greatest challenge is to incorporate the rules of good behavior so readily that you don't have to think about them at all. For details on how to make a positive impression on the job, see Chapter 2.

## *Working in diverse environments*

In today's increasingly global business environment, people of various physical abilities, races, ethnicities, and genders work together. But misunderstandings, thoughtlessness, and poor attitudes create barriers among colleagues and cause fear, hurt, and isolation. The use of appropriate language is crucial for respectful and dignified communication. Education and considerate thought are needed to remove misunderstandings and unnecessary discrimination in the workplace. See Chapter 3 for full information about acting gracefully in diverse work environments.

## *Dressing well*

Psychologists say that most people form impressions of others in the first four minutes and that 80 percent of an impression is based on nonverbal signs. In other words, what comes out of your mouth has very little to do with how people judge you. Also, after you make a first impression, getting people to change that judgment is hard.

How you dress, how you groom yourself, and how you handle your body language in the workplace are all part of your "packaging." As in product packaging, you can present yourself to be most appealing, and you can present yourself differently according to the time and place.



A well-mannered person always considers the impression communicated by clothing, body language, and grooming. Always be thinking about what your appearance says about you. Never pretend to be anything you aren't. You should not be uncomfortable or present an image that is not you, but you should present the best you that you possibly can. For more on appropriate business attire and professional presence, see Chapter 4.

## *Communicating in the Business Arena*

Clear communication in business is an essential part of being courteous to others, whether you're conversing in person, talking on the phone, writing a letter, or chatting on the Internet. What you say reflects who you are, so you want your words to build others up rather than tear them down in any way.

### *Polishing your introductions*

In the business world, you meet new people all the time, for many reasons and in many situations. Being able to introduce others makes everyone feel comfortable and is one of the most useful skills you can acquire in business. The ability to remember names, shake hands properly, and graciously accept and receive a business card demonstrates that you're at ease and in control, which sets others at ease too.



Knowing how to make a graceful introduction not only allows you to concentrate on making a good impression, but also gives you the confidence and power to nurture relationships from the get-go. To discover more about practicing these skills and using them properly, see Chapter 5.

### *Mastering the art of conversation, in person and on the phone*

So many people work in front of a computer screen all day that they tend to forget the usual social graces of conversing. A conversation occurs when two or more people discuss a topic, exchange ideas, share information, and give one another an opportunity to contribute. Having a conversation is the best way to find out what other people like, think, and need.

Every time you make or receive a telephone call at work, you're representing your company. Many times, the first contact a person has with a company is over the phone, so the impression you make on the phone may be a lasting one. Therefore, you want to sound professional.

Take the opportunity to reinforce your business contacts and improve your work relationships by exercising your best manners when conversing in person and using the phone. For more on improving your conversational skills, both in person and on the phone, head to Chapters 6 and 7.

## *Understanding business writing, online and off*

Just like a handshake or good phone skills, business correspondence can tell people a lot about you. Anything that you mail out is a reflection on your company, so make sure that you correspond professionally. Selecting appropriate stationery, crafting a business letter correctly, and remembering to send thank-you notes not only makes you look good, but also shows that you care about the impression you make for your company.



Communicating by e-mail is no different from writing on company letterhead. A business communication is business, period. A certain degree of formality is required. Just because e-mail tends to be more immediate and personable doesn't mean that it needs to get personal. Just thinking about how the other person is likely to receive your communication can go a long way toward preventing misunderstandings and offenses. A simple test is to ask yourself, "How would I feel in these circumstances if I received this message?"

To find out more about how business correspondence can be the best way to accomplish your business goals, see Chapter 8. I discuss the rules of proper work e-mail in Chapter 9.

## *Taking care when using technology*

The Internet has developed its own unique rules for proper behavior. Although the Internet may seem to offer a perplexing array of new etiquette situations, the old rules still apply. Basic courtesy always means considering others' needs first; it requires you to make others feel comfortable, which forms the basis of what's called *netiquette*.



One of the main principles of Internet etiquette is remembering that you are interacting with real people in real time. Even though you see only words on a monitor, a flesh-and-blood person is behind them. This live human being deserves the same respect that you would offer him face to face.

The manners associated with these new devices have taken a turn for the worse. The problem isn't the technologies, but the ways they are being used and abused. Technology has made communication easier, yet at the same time, people have created a need for instant gratification. For guidelines on minding your manners with technology, see Chapter 9. Although the information there may not be totally new to you, knowing the rationale behind it is always helpful. Either way, being able to distinguish yourself online as a considerate person to your colleagues and coworkers is important.

## *Behaving No Matter Where Your Business Takes You*

In business today, you must know how to conduct yourself properly in a variety of situations. From company parties to the boardroom, your behavior is observed and judged daily by employers, clients, and coworkers. Knowing how to behave properly and respond in certain business situations puts everyone at ease and builds self-confidence. Your ability to establish effective working relationships wherever your business takes you can make or break your career.

### *Meetings*

Business meetings are one area in which poor etiquette can have really negative effects. No matter what your job entails or where you work, knowing meeting-etiquette rules should be a priority. Meetings provide you an opportunity to shine in front of your clients, coworkers, and superiors. You can demonstrate your meeting manners in quite a few ways with positive results. If you haven't thought about what goes into being an effective meeting chair or participant, or about how knowing a few meeting guidelines can improve your chances of success, check out Chapter 10.

### *Business meals and parties*



The business world can be quite overwhelming, even if you never leave the office. When entertaining enters into the business mix, it's easy to get confused about what is appropriate and what is not. The goal of mixing business with pleasure is to create a warm social atmosphere even with the necessary business undertones. Business entertaining is a way to foster personal trust and confidence in others and is the fastest-growing way to do business. From staff breakfasts to working lunches to cocktail receptions for clients, being in your best business form at any meal really pays off. See Chapter 11 to find out key strategies for entertaining.

Table manners can make the difference between getting that promotion or not, and between closing that business deal or not. Fortunately, old habits can be changed if you want to change them; all it takes is some effort. For a thorough discussion of proper dining etiquette, see Chapter 12.

## *Conferences, trade shows, off-site activities, and other events*

Conferences and trade shows may masquerade as chances to update the status of a project or to catch up on industry developments, but they're really a way to find out about and measure other people. These events give you an opportunity to shine in front of your superiors and your peers. Industry events are also great places to make contacts in your field and find out more about what's going on at other companies. No matter how you feel about these events (some people love them, and some people hate them), guidelines exist. For details on attending special work-related events, see Chapter 13.

Most would agree that off-site company activities are an effective means of team building and a big part of today's work environment. But, knowing how to be a team player and balance work with play requires a few skills. Whether you're hosting a group activity, playing golf with a client, or attending a business retreat, make your way to Chapter 14 for a few key etiquette elements that can help you when taking part in a variety of off-site activities.

## *Life's major passages*

Special occasions, such as a coworker's wedding or your boss's birthday, can put your manners to the test. Even though you may encounter these situations less frequently in business, they often require you to be aware of a different set of etiquette rules. Whether you're attending a christening, a funeral, or a graduation, what counts most is that you are there for your coworkers, colleagues, and clients and that you show you care. Head to Chapter 15 for more on making it through life's big events with grace and style.

## *Overcoming Challenges at Work*

Your success in getting along with others in your workplace has a major influence on your career success. You can have excellent job skills and good productivity, but if you don't fit in with the people you work with and your colleagues find you difficult, you'll have a much tougher time winning promotions and advancing your career. On the flip side, you may have to work with someone difficult or manage conflict among colleagues. In this section, I introduce the basics of overcoming these and other challenges.

## *Dealing with difficult people*

Sometimes, folks who work together don't get along. Some people are difficult because of their personalities; others are difficult because of their positions in the company. You may never know why certain people are difficult, but the reason could be a lack of self-esteem or confidence.

For better or worse, what goes on at work comprises the most significant portion of your social life. You most likely spend more time with coworkers than you do with friends outside work, and in many instances, you spend more time at your job than you do with your family. Mastering the techniques of understanding various personality traits and group dynamics will make your work life a lot less stressful. See Chapter 16 for complete guidelines on dealing with difficult personalities.

## *Coping with conflict*

You can manage office conflict effectively in lots of ways. Practice active listening, ask clarifying questions, be willing to compromise, look at the bigger picture, watch your language, and put yourself in the other person's shoes. When the temperature goes up, actively look for ways to cool it down. Vent if you must (just not at work).

Believe it or not, some conflict is actually helpful. In Chapter 17, you find out why. That chapter also introduces some effective conflict-management tools to help you and your colleagues get along better.

## *Managing ethical dilemmas*

Countless unfamiliar situations can arise in the workplace — situations in which you simply don't know how to behave. Knowing how to handle every situation that comes up is impossible, but there are ways to handle the ups and downs of life on the job. See Chapter 18 to learn how your ethical manners can be your trademark.

## *Handling sexuality*

Know your company's policies *before* you get into any situation involving more than day-to-day contact with another employee. Your company may have rigid rules about fraternizing and may have special provisions designed to head off suspicions of harassment. The etiquette of office romances



involves a combination of good judgment and discretion, but company rules are absolute. Yield to temptation of the wrong sort, and you may find yourself out of a job or transferred to a remote location that's snowbound eight months out of the year.

Assuming that both you and your prospective partner are unencumbered and officially eligible, and that your company has no policy against it, there's nothing shameful about a blossoming romance. But no etiquette exists for illicit romances — just sad consequences. To learn more about handling sexuality in the workplace, check out Chapter 19.

## *Traveling Near and Far*

You can't find a tougher test of your manners than when you're traveling, especially when you're traveling abroad. No question, travel — especially business travel — can put people under tremendous stress. But being away from home doesn't give you permission to abandon politeness. Good travelers are always ready for the unexpected.

### *Packing up and heading out*

Being a model of good manners means that when you leave home, your manners travel with you. Knowing a few key elements for having a safe and successful trip is essential. What does that have to do with etiquette? The better prepared you are for a trip, the better your experience will be. Head to Chapter 20 for details on traveling *anywhere* with your manners intact.

### *Acting gracefully after you arrive*

After you arrive at your destination, you have to adapt to the local ways of getting around, time changes, unusual foods or table manners, and means of communication. Feeling completely comfortable in another culture can take months or sometimes years, but with just a little research, you can lessen your chances of committing a minor error or a major faux pas.

To acclimate yourself to a different culture and avoid offending your host or business colleagues, try to blend in, dress conservatively and appropriately, keep your voice low, refrain from showing strong emotions in public, and behave in a pleasant manner no matter what happens. Also, when you're asked to taste some exotic food, do your best to be a good sport! For more on ways of adapting to another culture, see Chapter 21.



## *Minding your manners in different regions of the world*

A wide variety of appropriate behavior exists for building business relationships in different areas of the world. By discovering and understanding the customs and cultures of the country you're visiting, you show that you have respect for the other side, and respect is crucial in building a rapport and developing business relationships. For complete details on regional business etiquette, travel to Chapter 22.

