

Top 10 Business Etiquette Tips

Good manners can be one of your most important assets. Just in case your career fate is in the hands of someone who is a stickler for proper manners, it might be wise to read and practice the following 10 business etiquette tips:

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Know how to introduce your spouse

Do not say, "This is my wife, Mary." Say instead, "This is Mary, my wife." Why? When you put the description before the name, it implies that your spouse belongs to you, which is demeaning. The description after the name suggests an independent person who just happens to be married to you.

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Do not become the office clown

A few people do this out of nervousness. Some do it merely to be liked, as it achieved that end in the past. But gaining a reputation as the office jokester can be detrimental to your long term career. The reasoning is simple: Coworkers are less likely to take you and your ideas seriously. If this advice contradicts your naturally jovial personality, here is an option. Maintain a low-key office persona during working hours and a lighter, less business-like persona after hours.

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Do not get intoxicated at business-related functions

This is one of the biggest out-of-office blunders. Using profanity in the office is the only other blunder that tops this. For the record: If you care about your career and the way you are perceived by others, never -- repeat, never -- do either.

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Do not give your boss a gift

Unless you have a personal relationship with your boss, do not give him or her a gift for holidays or birthdays. It is inappropriate, can be seen as apple-polishing, and puts the employer in an awkward situation. In general, try to downplay exchanging personal gifts in your office. An option is to create an office fund for purchasing birthday flowers or taking the employee to lunch.

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Do not correct your boss in public

If a mistake was made, explain it in private. An exception: If you are in a meeting and your boss makes a major error in his or her statements, you can speak up gently with something like: The last figure I got was \$2 million, not \$4 million, Jim.

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Rise and shake hands during business introductions

In a business situation, when anyone enters the room and is being introduced, stand and shake hands. Contrary to popular belief, it does not matter who puts their hand out first. Another sidebar: Before a staff meeting starts, wait in the conference room for the person who called the meeting to arrive; remain standing until they enter and let them take the best seat.

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Avoid sexual harassment

Play it safe and err on the side of caution. Some men still feel obligated to tell a female colleague or client how nice she looks since she changed her hairstyle or how attractive an outfit looks on her. However, such comments denigrate your business relationship. Save such compliments for personal friends.

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Mind your mealtime manners

When calling to extend a breakfast or lunch invitation, you should clearly and immediately establish yourself as the host. When it's time to pay the bill, the rule is simple -- the host pays. The host should give the guest a choice of dates (e.g., How about next week? Monday or Wednesday?), a choice of restaurants, and a choice of times (Would you prefer 12:30 or 1:00?). Never discuss business until after your guest has had the chance to order.

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Know when to use someone's first name

The general rule is that you always defer to authority by using an honorific (Mr., Ms., Mrs., or Dr.) until you are given permission to use a first name. It is always inappropriate to call prospective clients by their first name until they give you permission to do so. Additionally, even if you are on a first-name basis with your boss,

always introduce your boss to someone as Mr., Ms., Mrs., etc., and include their title (e.g., This is Mr. John Doe, vice president of Operations). At that point, your boss can tell the person to call them by their first name, if so desired.

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Never use profanity in any business situations

This one is normally considered the biggest breach of business etiquette, especially when it is aimed at people. There are few things that so touch us with instinctive revulsion as the use of profanity. Remember: Having good manners costs nothing, but it buys everything.