

Workplace Etiquette

COMPETENCY

John Scroggins, November 16, 2024



Imagine that you're walking past the breakroom at work and overhear the following conversation between two coworkers, Ben and Sarah.

Sarah: You ever notice how people have no idea about basic workplace etiquette?

Ben: (Laughs) Oh, all the time. What got you thinking about it?

Sarah: I swear, someone just microwaved popcorn without thinking about the smell. It's like they did it just to annoy everyone. We've got a shared breakroom, but some people treat it like it's their personal kitchen.

Ben: Yeah, that's the thing, isn't it? It's the little things that drive you nuts. Like, people who don't clean up after themselves. Or leave their dirty dishes in the sink and act like it's someone else's job.

Sarah: I hate that. It's like, why is that so hard? A little bit of responsibility goes a long way. (You can almost see her rolling her eyes as she says it.)

Baton Exchange

Ben: You'd think so, but I think some people just don't get the concept of "shared space." They're all about their own comfort and don't consider how it affects others.

Sarah: Right? And don't get me started on the phone calls in the middle of the office. I get that people need to talk, but there's this one guy who insists on taking loud personal calls at his desk. He's always talking about his weekend plans or whatever, but it's like, buddy, we can hear everything.

Ben: (Laughs) Ugh, I know the type. Just yesterday, one of my teammates started a video call in the open office. No headphones. So all of us get to listen to his client's entire pitch. I can't concentrate when I hear half of a conversation.

Sarah: Some people need a reminder about boundaries. Like, maybe step outside if you're going to be on the phone for more than two minutes?

Ben: Exactly. I think a lot of it comes down to awareness. People are in their own little bubbles, and they don't realize how their actions affect the flow of the office.

Sarah: (Sighs) It's true. But I feel like we could all be a little more considerate. Like, not walking in front of someone while they're on a call, or not hovering over someone's desk when they're deep in thought.

Ben: (Chuckles) Yeah, basic stuff. Just treat the office like a community, you know? We're all in it together.

Sarah: Yeah. Respect goes a long way. If we all did the little things, the big things wouldn't feel so... irritating.

Ben: Maybe we need a "Workplace Etiquette 101" poster. You know, like a class for the office.

Sarah: (Laughs) Honestly, I'd sign up for that.

Thing is, your cube is beside Sarah's. You wonder if she's talking about you. Workplace etiquette plays a crucial role in fostering a positive, productive, and respectful work environment. It sets the tone for professional interactions, ensuring clear communication, mutual respect, and collaboration among colleagues. By adhering to basic etiquette principles—such as being punctual, listening actively, and maintaining a polite tone—employees can build strong working relationships and promote teamwork. Etiquette also helps in managing conflicts effectively, as it encourages individuals to approach disagreements with respect and tact. Moreover, it reflects an employee's professionalism and can influence how they are perceived by peers and supervisors. In a diverse workplace, understanding cultural differences in etiquette is essential to avoid misunderstandings and create an inclusive atmosphere.

Ultimately, workplace etiquette not only enhances day-to-day operations but also contributes to employee satisfaction, reducing stress and fostering a sense of community within the organization. Proper etiquette helps maintain a balance between professionalism and approachability, leading to a harmonious and efficient workplace.

The bible doesn't talk about "workplace etiquette" per se, but it does talk a lot about relationships and about work. At the heart, good workplace etiquette is about loving our neighbor as ourselves. (Mark 12:30-31) It's about serving others, putting their needs above our own. "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves; each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." Philippians 2:3-4. And it's about seeing people as God's image bearers and so worthy of respect. (Genesis 1:27)

Beyond the details of what to wear, what food not to warm up in the microwave, the proper use of email, and so on, is the core of behaving from a foundation of good character (a different section of Ask Your Mentor.) Also, the nuance of workplace etiquette is figuring out what others consider respectful and good etiquette given the workplace context. So, we need to be a cultural detective to understand the specific workplace culture, adapt in a way that doesn't compromise being disciples of Jesus, and sometimes in prayerful and wise ways seek to influence redemptive change away from broken cultural etiquette practices toward restorative, flourishing ones.

Workplace Etiquette Self-Rate

Below are common desirable etiquette behaviors for typical workplaces. Rate yourself 1 to 4 on your etiquette. Better yet, ask a boss or trusted coworker/classmate to rate you. "4" is excellent, "1" is "Uh oh!"

Good etiquette	Rate	Good Etiquette	Rate
Confident, not cocky or corrosive		Persistence in trying to solve a problem before asking for help.	
Doesn't "reply all" to an email chain		Refuse to participate in gossip	
Takes personal conversations away from coworkers		Doesn't use emojis or multiple exclamation points (if any) in work emails.	
Leaves personal emotions outside of work		Doesn't talk back to the boss.	
Emotionally bothersome workplace issues addressed with HR or supervisor		Doesn't whine, complain, blame	

Ask questions when I don't know.		Punctual to work, meetings, etc..	
Respectfully disagree while not being dogmatic.		Initiate and engage with coworkers to build relationships.	
Remember that work social events are still work- relax but maintain respect.		"Can do" attitude, not a "that's not my job" attitude.	
Maintains a backup plan for "oops." (Extra shirt, toothbrush/paste, umbrella, brush/comb, etc..)		Uses professional personal email address with coworkers rather than unprofessional one. (e.g. toosexy12@gmail.com)	
Bring in shareable goodies.		Willing to take on new tasks	
Flexible: can occasionally work outside standard work hours		Ear plugs properly plugged in while playing media	
Dress appropriately		Practice being open, friendly, approachable: smile, greetings, patient	
Cultivate a "fail forward," growth mindset		Use good conflict resolution skills	
Use good verbal communication skills		Shows restraint with taking the "freebies" that may come into the office.	

Ask Your Mentor

1. What role do you see workplace etiquette having in one's career trajectory?
2. Which of the above etiquette practices took you a while to learn? How did you learn them?
3. What do you wish you would have known early in your career about workplace etiquette?
4. Can you think of any etiquette practices that aren't mentioned above?
5. Can you share any stories of someone (no names please) who failed to practice good work etiquette and how that impacted work relationships?
6. Can you think of other scriptural principles to share for application to workplace etiquette?
7. Which of the above do you think I should begin practicing first?

Go Do

Baton Exchange

1. Ask your boss to use the self-rating tool to assess your workplace etiquette. Ask them which two you should prioritize improving and their recommendations on how to. Then practice their recommendations over the next 30 days and share with your mentor.
2. Ask God, "Which of the above practices should I prioritize? What would it look like to trust you to help me with that?"

Go Deeper: Further Conversation & Study

1. What do you think is the central/big idea of this article or how would you summarize the article?
2. What big problem do you think this session may be addressing?
3. What emotions, if any, did you have from what you learned in this session? Was there anything that surprised, excited, or angered you?

Sources & Resources

- Video: Workplace Etiquette Tips | The Dos and Don't at Work, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nYTkI9b0R_I
- Christian Values in the Workplace - Integrity, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/christian-values-workplace-integrity-leslie/>
- Email Etiquette Dos and Don'ts, <https://verticalresponse.com/blog/email-etiquette-dos-and-donts-2/>
- What Not to Wear to Work (for Women), By Laura Sinberg, Forbes.com, http://www.forbes.com/2009/07/22/office-fashion-sexy-forbes-woman-style-clothes_slide_3.html?partner=email
- A Guide To Social Dress Codes For Men: Business, Formal, Optional, <https://www.realmenrealstyle.com/guide-dress-codes-men/>
- Meeting Etiquette, <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/meeting-etiquette>
- Talking Personal at Work, <https://www.bluesummitsupplies.com/blogs/career-and-culture/personal-conversations-at-work-keeping-a-work-life-balance>