

Professional Business Etiquette: Things you need to know

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Business etiquette is a set of rules that govern the way people interact with one another in business, with customers, suppliers, with inside or outside bodies. It is all about conveying the right image and behaving in an appropriate way.

Five business etiquette sins

1. Not greeting or using a name

When people in business ignore a simple greeting and acknowledgement, they are losing out on building a relationship and possibly a sale. People feel respected when they are greeted, and if their name is known and used it is always impressive.

Something as simple as eye contact, a smile, just using some basic social skills in order to make them feel welcome.

For example, say something like: ‘Good morning, welcome, how can I help you?’, rather than ‘Yeah, can I help you?’

2. Leaving people waiting

Leaving people waiting, especially if they have an appointment, without any kind of explanation or apology is rude. Waits can be five minutes or in some cases over an hour.

Whichever, a simple apology or explanation, and time frame are all that is needed.

3. Interrupting

Often people will just barge in and interrupt a conversation or meeting that is occurring without even apologising to the people involved, which is very impolite, even for a senior manager with an important issue.

Mobile phones can cause problems, with people taking calls in the middle of meetings, for example.

It is good business etiquette to switch your phone off before the meeting, or if you are waiting on an urgent call from someone, let the people in the meeting know. Most importantly, wrap up the conversation as quickly as possible.

4. Lack of courtesy and respect

Often a customer making an unusual request will receive quite negative reactions and will be treated as if they have no right to make such a request. When someone has a special requirement or seems demanding, they should still be treated politely and with respect.

Rules can be explained and enforced, but it doesn't mean it has to be done with attitude.

5. Breaking a confidence

If someone tells you something in confidence, it is not acceptable to go around telling other people about it. These behaviours create a negative impression of your business.

Successful organisations often have one thing that is embedded in the way the organisation works, and that is a high standard of business etiquette.

Rules for good business etiquette

1. Always use names in a meeting

It is easy to forget people's names when in a business meeting, and for this reason, it is a good idea to write all the names down (and check their spelling) on a piece of paper in front of you.

It is common to say 'treat others as you would like to be treated yourself'. However, different

people have different expectations. You might like to be called by your first name when being greeted by a service provider, however, someone else might prefer to be referred to more formally, with Mr, Ms, or Mrs.

You should not just assume that people like things the same way you do. If in doubt about the level of formality to use, it is probably better to go for more formality, rather than less, to avoid offending anyone.

2. The three Rs

It is important to be considerate about the psychological needs of different people. A very useful rule of thumb to go by is that of the three Rs.

- Recognition: using names, greetings, and making a point of acknowledging people.
- Respect: treating people with respect, value and courtesy, and apologising to them where the situation calls for it.
- Response: people do not want to be kept waiting, they need to be responded to.

3. Wardrobe and hygiene

Dirty clothes, fingernail biting, poor hygiene, unclean hair and body odour especially, can be a real turn

off. It can be difficult having to tell someone they have body odour, but it is necessary, especially if the person has to deal with others and outside clients.

4. Cracking inappropriate jokes

Etiquette is all about behaviour and sensitivity. For example, cracking jokes at times where it is inappropriate, or inappropriate jokes, in general, shows a total lack of sensitivity.

How to improve business etiquette

Often people do not even realise they are not showing a high level of etiquette. The best way to develop good business etiquette would be to get together as a team and consider:

- How do we work with one another?
- What is the image we convey to people?
- Are we polite enough?
- How can we show more respect, be more responsive and recognise people?
- What are our standards?

Often you can generate improvements in just that one session. Rather than calling it ‘business etiquette’, you could call it ‘customer service improvement’ or ‘responsiveness’.

Business etiquette can sound like it focuses on small things that are unimportant, but all together they make a big difference to the workplace and the kind of responses received in all areas.

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