



Learning the ABCs of Workplace Etiquette

Written by: Elizabeth L. Craig, Member of MCDA

Etiquette plays a major role in the business world today. Like it or not, good manners in the workplace are often equated with competence in business. To many, sloppy manners equal lack of ability. In the current competitive global economy, new and seasoned professionals must seize every opportunity to favorably distinguish themselves and their employer from the competition.

Business people interviewed for this article said, “cover the basics” of manners. Job seekers of any age need to remember that it’s often the little things that can cost you the business deal or the job offer. Here are some basic etiquette reminders:

Be prompt — There is no such thing as “fashionably late” in the business world. Neither party needs to wait longer than 15 minutes for the other to arrive. It’s recommended that you arrive at least 10 minutes before a scheduled meeting time. If you know you will be late, call so the other person either knows to wait or you can determine another time to meet.

The all-important handshake — Do not underestimate the importance of an appropriate handshake. As a career development professional, the most asked question I get from business people is, “How is my handshake?” A handshake is a big part of making a powerful first impression and needs to be practiced with those who will provide honest feedback.

A firm, assertive handshake demonstrates self-confidence. Handshake tips include: upright body posture; meet hands, web-to-web between the thumb and first finger; keep the handshake firm — not too limp and definitely not bone crushing. Shake hands up and down once or twice from the elbow, make eye contact, and smile. Shake hands when first meeting someone and when closing a job interview or business conversation.

Nametag Placement — Often overlooked, where you put your nametag is so important. If you are wearing a nametag, you want people to remember you and your name — so make it easy. The most helpful place for your nametag is in the right shoulder area. The right shoulder placement allows people to see your name effortlessly as they shake hands and naturally look up to make eye contact and see your smile — exactly the positive impression you want to make in every situation.

Introductions — No matter how you might goof up while making an introduction, what’s important is that you attempted the introduction. The easiest method to follow is to say the highest-ranking person’s name first. Say the name of your clients, senior executives and your

boss first and then say the person's name you are introducing them to. If you can, stand when being introduced.

Thank you notes — Job seekers should know that the interview is not over until they e-mail and/or send their handwritten thank you note. Often it is the job seeker who follows up with a thank you note that gets the job offer. In business, thank you notes build important personal relationships because people like being thanked for a job well done.

When it comes to business etiquette, the two most important phrases you'll ever use are "Thank you" and "I apologize." These words say more about your manners and professionalism than you might realize.

Remember that your manners are part of your overall job performance. Whether it's your first job or you are in a management position, take time to learn, practice and observe etiquette in the workplace.

Elizabeth L. Craig is a Master Career Development Professional and a national award-winning author

###