



BUSINESS ETIQUETTE



2010 Etiquette Leader

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system without permission, in writing from the author.

Table of Contents



Table of Contents	3
Business Etiquette:What is it and why do we need it?	4
Some startling statistics:	6
Top Ten Annoying Work Habits	7
Gender and Sexual Preferences in the Business Arena	8
Gender and Chivalry in Modern Business	8
Tips on Handshaking	10
Handshakes to avoid:	12
Ready to connect for a correct handshake	13
Eye Contact	14
Handshaking Internationally	16
Hugs or high fives?	18
Introductions	20
The Protocol of Introductions	21
The Business of Business Cards	23
Nametag Etiquette	26
Business Correspondence	27
Writing Personal Notes in Business	28
Thank you Notes	29
Professional Presence	30
The Secrets of Professionals	30
Steps to Professional Presence	32
First Impressions	36
Office Etiquette Tips	39
Meeting Etiquette	44
Tips for the Meeting Participant	46

Business Etiquette: What is it and why do we need it?

Many of us grew up believing that somehow etiquette and manners were at odds with being yourself or being real. No one wanted to be like Eddie Haskell from the old television series *Leave it to Beaver* who was described as being so polite he was manipulative and insincere. Etiquette was thought to be putting on airs. You only needed it if you were at a formal event or a wedding. Did it really matter if you tipped your hat to a lady? Especially when gentlemen no longer wore hats? Even dining etiquette seemed superfluous when you did most of your eating out of a box in the back seat of the car on the way to hockey practice.

It is true there is some ridiculous pomposity associated with the etiquette rules of past generations, so naturally, in “modern” times people are confused about business etiquette, what it means, and even if it is required. The fact is, etiquette deals with so much more than which fork to use or where to rest your cutlery during a formal meal. In today's office environment, basic etiquette can assist you in handling almost any situation that may come your way. That's because etiquette is about respect, leadership and consideration for others. It means putting people at ease, evaluating their needs and situation and considering how your actions affect others.

No one would argue the work place has changed dramatically in the last 20 years. There are more women in the work force and the chivalrous or chauvinist attitude that was once prevalent towards women is no longer acceptable. There is greater cultural diversity, employees with physical or mental challenges and advances in technology that have changed the way we behave and interact. Now that people have realized that the old rules no longer apply and there is a need for business etiquette. Knowledge of business etiquette is critical in advancing your career.

Although most breaches in etiquette do not immediately result in drastic consequences, the cumulative effect of repeated faux pas can be loss of respect, loss of reputation, employee dissatisfaction, absenteeism and ultimately loss of business.

Having good manners in the work place means working with others so that you are a positive part of the work environment even when the environment is stressful, when others aren't being helpful and when some people are being out and out rude. A well-mannered

person apologizes if he is having a bad day, tries to improve and tries to promote a positive work environment.

Business etiquette helps eliminate those actions that can make doing business stressful and unpleasant. If you are stressed at the end of the day it is often because someone has been rude or disrespectful towards you.

If you are sensitive to people and treat people with respect, kindness and consideration and you exhibit nourishing behaviors, people respect you and are more cooperative. Respect gains respect....Life at work is more pleasant, life in general is more pleasant, less stressful and more productive.

Because the prime directive in etiquette is respecting other people, it means that in the work place you acknowledge that others have rights, are entitled to private space and deserve consideration. A polite person is sensitive to differences in personality, appreciates diversity and acts accordingly. One of the keys to etiquette is paying enough attention to others to be able to modify your own behavior to accommodate them.

Etiquette for etiquette's sake is an empty activity and a meaningless ritual. But genuine good manners and a working knowledge of professional behavior are essential and productive business skills. Good manners build better relationships, humanize and harmonize the work place and promote a powerful spirit of co-operation.

What's in it for you? Business etiquette training increases productivity, worker satisfaction, worker retention and business growth by helping everyone get along.

When it comes to manners in the workplace do the following:

- Respect the company's culture. If your company's culture is laid back and casual, dress well but avoid wearing your expensive Italian suits.
- Respect rank and treat it appropriately. Learn your company's hierarchy and how each level relates to you.
- Be courteous to others and respect their privacy by not overstepping personal boundaries with unwanted intimacy.

- Respect others opinions and handle disagreements gracefully. Acknowledge and respect that people's religions, moral and political viewpoints differ and refrain from imposing yours on them.
- Handle workplace stress without inflicting it on others. Stress is unavoidable, however you can learn to handle your response to it and avoid inflicting stress on others by shouting or acting inappropriately.
- Extend courtesy to all members of the company regardless of whether they're in the maintenance department or senior management.
- Be courteous when using shared equipment that belongs to the company. It is owned by the company for the use of many. The copy machine is not for you to make multiple copies of your resume.

Some startling statistics:

A survey of 2300 people conducted by www.truejobs.com indicated the number one cause of stress in the work place was co-workers annoying habits.

- 60% said that these annoying habits affected their work performance
- 40% said as a result they looked for other employment.
- The number one complaint – co-workers talking too loud on the phone.
- The number two complaint – people complaining about work and general negativity.

A gallop Poll in 2001 reported:

- 80% of workers feel stress on the job
- 14% felt like striking a co-worker in the past year but didn't
- One in four reported being driven to tears at work.

If we all practiced good business etiquette and were respectful and considerate of others, much of the stress could be eliminated.

Top Ten Annoying Work Habits

Winning too much: The need to win at all costs and in all situations – when it matters, when it doesn't, and when it's totally beside the point.

Adding too much value: The overwhelming desire to add our two cents to every discussion.

Passing judgment: The need to rate others and impose our standards on them.

Making destructive comments: The needless sarcasms and cutting remarks that we think make us sound humorous, sharp or witty.

Starting with “no,” “but” or “however”: The overuse of these negative qualifiers which secretly say to everyone “I’m right. You’re wrong.”

Telling the world how smart we are: The need to show people we’re smarter than they think we are.

Speaking when angry: Using emotional volatility as a management tool.

Negativity or “I have to tell you why that won’t work:” The need to share our negative thoughts even when we weren’t asked.

Withholding information: The refusal to share information in order to maintain an advantage over others.

Failing to give proper recognition: The inability to praise and reward others.

Gender and Sexual Preferences in the Business Arena

Dealing with gender and sex in the today's workplace can be challenging. In the same way that business is color blind, it is also sex blind. The easiest way to deal with it is assume everyone has a sex life and then forget about it! What people do in their private life is private and none of your business. Heterosexual, gay, bisexual, whatever someone's sexual preference might be... is none of your business. Assume others are interested in love and sex, but the details are... none of your business. Don't make snide remarks, jokes, gossip or speculate and you will be fine.

Gender and Chivalry in Modern Business

Business etiquette is gender neutral or gender blind. What matters is title and position, not gender. It makes no difference if it is a man or a woman that requires assistance, you should provide assistance when it's needed. A polite person extends a hand, helps with packages, opens a door, helps with a coat, regardless of the other person's gender.

There are still men who insist on social courtesies or chivalrous behaviour and in these instances, women should accept it graciously with a thank you. There are also instances when what today we might consider old-fashioned courtesy is appropriate. For instance, when you are dealing with an elderly person who might expect these courtesies you should extend them. Consideration and kindness are just that, whatever the motive.

Some examples of gender-neutral chivalry appropriate in business today include:

Opening a door. If you arrive at the door first, you should open it. If there is someone behind you, hold the door as you go through so it doesn't slam in the person's face.

Revolving door. The host, man or woman, goes through the revolving door first and awaits his guest on the other side.

Entering an elevator. In the past men entered an elevator first so women, who are generally shorter, were at the front and could exit first. Today, enter an elevator and stand to the side or go to the rear regardless of gender.

Exiting an elevator. Exit first if you are closest to the door. If you are in the front of a crowded elevator, exit to let those in the rear get off.

Helping with a coat. Anyone who is having difficulty putting on or taking off a coat should be assisted.

Paying for a meal. Whoever extended the invitation and made the arrangements is the host and is responsible for paying the bill regardless of gender.

Standing to meet or greet. Always stand to meet or greet someone especially an elderly person, a person higher in rank or a client. It is a sign of respect.

Walking on the outside. The custom of gentlemen taking the outer position on the sidewalk dates from the time when people threw night soil out the window and carriages driving by could splash those next to the sidewalk. Gentlemen may still choose to walk on the outside of the sidewalk today, although the practice is waning.

Hand shaking. A man does not need to wait to initiate a handshake with women unless visiting a foreign country where protocol may vary. Man or woman, extend your hand to meet or greet someone regardless of gender.

Carrying something. Regardless of gender, if a person needs assistance, offer it.

Going up stairs. In the past, when women wore long gowns with trains, men preceded women up stairs because it was less treacherous. They didn't want to step on the train or gown. Today this is optional, but to prevent the awkwardness that women feel when a man's eyes are directly in line with their rear end, men should precede women up stairs when faced with this dilemma.

Tips on Handshaking

In North America, handshakes are the only universally accepted greeting, socially and in business. When traveling to other countries you may encounter other types of acceptable greetings—including hugs and kisses.

In typical North American environments, business colleagues may be uncomfortable when others are hugging or kissing. They are not sure whether they have to take part and join in a group hug or even how to accomplish it properly. In some work environments patting or hugging could be even be construed as harassment. It is much more prudent to stick with an acceptable handshake.

In North America, you are judged on your handshake. A good handshake tells others you are confident and comfortable in your environment. It also makes others feel welcome and at ease. Here are the protocols for a proper handshake.

- **When to Shake hands?** Shake hands when meeting someone for the first time, meeting someone you have not seen for a while, greeting a host or guest, saying good bye, when extending congratulations or condolences or when someone extends their hand to you.
- **Stand.** Always stand to greet someone and shake hands. It is a sign of respect. If you are unable to stand because you are restricted in some way, rise even partially, to shake.
- **Eye Contact.** Start a handshake by making eye contact with the other person.
- **Smile.** In North America, a smile includes your eyes and showing your teeth.
- **Extend your hand.** Vertically with the thumb up.
- **Firm.** A good handshake in North America is firm but not bone crushing.
- **Web to Web.** Grasp the other hand firmly, make contact with the web of the other person's hand "web to web" and curl your fingers around their hand.
- **Pump.** Shake with two or three pumps from the elbow down, then drop your hand and continue the greeting. To keep pumping or holding the person's hand while you continue the introduction makes others uncomfortable.

- **Say hello.** Say something like; “Hello my name is Louise Fox. It’s a pleasure to meet you. I have heard a lot about you.” “Hi,” is too casual or immature in a business environment. Always give both your first and last name so the person will reciprocate with both their first and last name. Depending on the circumstances, you may also include some information about yourself, where you work or what you do.

To not receive a handshake is very rude unless you have something wrong with you such as a very bad cold or an injury. If you are concerned about contacting harmful bacteria from someone’s hands, carry an antibacterial spray or wash your hand thoroughly after meeting and greeting a group of people.

Protocol:

Shake hands with everyone you meet. No matter where your business takes you, make sure every business or social occasion begins and ends with a handshake. Handshaking like all business etiquette is gender neutral.

Handshakes to avoid:

- **The bone crusher** or “paralyzer,” is a handshake so firm that it hurts the recipient. Either the hand shaker doesn’t know his own strength or he is trying to intimidate or take control of the situation.
- **The wet fish** is the handshake that is cool, clammy and limp. This could indicate the person lacks confidence.
- **The fingertip holder.** This person extends his fingertips, rather than his hand. This person could be timid and easily intimidated. At the beginning of the 20th century when women shook hands, they extended two fingers to acquaintances and three fingers for friends and family.
- **The gloved handshake.** This hand shaker engages in a normal handshake and then places his second hand over the first hand. You might use this handshake when consoling someone you know well, but under normal circumstances you should stick to a regular handshake.
- **The Juggler.** This person is never ready for a handshake. He carries a drink in his right hand and a plate of food in his left so is never prepared to shake hands or present a business card. Remember the business priority when attending business-social events and always keep your right hand free to shake hands.

Ready to connect for a correct handshake



Both Hands are Connecting Web to Web



A Correct Handshake is Firm



Eye Contact

- Is expected in North America.
- Makes you look more confident and trustworthy.
- Tells the other person you are listening.
- Makes you a better listener.
- Makes the other person feel important while you are in control.

Make eye contact 40-60% of the time. If you make eye contact less than 40% you may be interpreted as being shy, shifty or having something to hide. If you make eye contact more than 60% of the time, others may interpret you as being critical, negative or putting them on the spot.



Area of Eye Contact in Business Relationships



Area of Eye Contact in Social Relationships



Area of Eye Contact in Intimate Relationships

Handshaking Internationally

Enhance your international perspective by following these tips:

- In the business arena, it doesn't matter who offers a hand first. The person who extends a hand first has an advantage. That person is establishing control, taking the initiative, being direct and showing confidence; all pluses in the business arena. The woman who extends her hand immediately eliminates any hesitation a man might have in offering his hand.
- Throughout the world, a handshake is appropriate in a business relationship. In certain cultures such as the Arab culture, a handshake may progress to embraces and kisses on both cheeks with men.
- Outside of North America, protocol dictates that you shake hands with everyone in a group. Even in a crowded room, don't stop halfway through with a "hello everyone" and then wave to the rest. This is considered a rejection of those you omitted and is dismissive and disrespectful.
- Shake hands on arrival and departure. The grip is firm, never hard. In some cultures, it will be lighter, but avoid the dead fish or fingertip handshake, which is universally unpopular.

Western and Eastern Europeans re-shake hands whenever they are apart, even for a short period of time. It is polite to shake hands when you leave for lunch and when you return.

Shake hands with the oldest person or the one of senior rank first and proceed on down the line. The ranking person extends his or her hand first. Women shake hands with each other and with men. It is up to the woman to initiate the handshake with a man. When a woman fails to extend her hand to a **European** man, she loses credibility.

The **French** shake hands in one brisk stroke. Europeans and Latin Americans execute a light handshake that lingers twice as long as an American handshake. Pulling the hand away too soon is interpreted as rejection.

In the **Middle-East**, a handshake is rather limp and lingering. Do not pull your hand away. Take your time. Shake hands with everyone on arrival and departure.

In **Eastern Asia**, you will encounter variations in handshakes from country to country. Some countries incorporate bows, others shake both hands at once and others have a longer pumping style.

In **Japan**, a light handshake and a nod of the head are appropriate.

Shake a woman's hand in the **United States** and abroad just as firmly as you would a man's.

Protocol:

No matter where you conduct business make sure every business or social meeting begins and ends with a handshake.

In business, all introductions are based on power and precedence. Gender does not affect the order of introductions. Women and men should be treated according to protocol, not chivalry. You say the name of the person who is most important and who has the most power or prestige first. The other person is introduced to that person. Mr./Ms Big, may I introduce to you Mr./Ms Small.

Hugs or high fives?

Hugs, kisses, high fives or handshakes? What is appropriate greeting behavior? Lately it seems that a fear of being either too casual (high fives) or too formal (handshakes) has led to more hugging. But, as we've grown so accustomed to mixing business and pleasure, many of us don't realize that there are actually guidelines for hugging too. The most important thing is to remember that sincerity is key. You shouldn't have to put a lot of thought into a gesture that is really very simple and spontaneous. Common sense is part of it and there are situational guidelines for hugging. Here are a few:

1. In a business situation, hugs are not recommended. How often have you entered a meeting room or planning committee session and have found yourself uncomfortable when someone else is embracing? Where do you look? Are you supposed to join in? Will there be a group hug? The awkwardness is usually related to realizing that everyone is on different playing fields. If the huggers have a "special relationship" and they are showing affection in public the outsider wonders, "How will I fit in as another business person in this mix?" This is especially true when going into negotiations or mergers. However, if your million-dollar client wants to give you a quick hug who are we to judge?
2. In social settings, if you have any doubt in your mind, do not hug. If you have to think about it first, a hug is probably not heart felt or sincere. How many times do you find yourself wishing you had never moved in to someone else's space with the intention of giving them some mutual kindness and warmth that was not reciprocated? Hugs shouldn't feel like an obligation and need not be a practiced routine that you put into your greeting repertoire. Often a huge smile and an "I am so glad to see you" have filled in for a hug and made all of us feel warm and welcome.
3. If you feel you need to hug, do it, but keep in mind the wants, needs and comfort of the person you are hugging. If they step back, it is a clue that a complete body embrace will not be accepted. On the other hand, leaning forward will indicate that they are coming into your space to accept or initiate a hug. Be yourself and do not feel as though every move you make needs to be monitored.

4. What do you do if you follow through with the urge to hug and instead of warmth in return, you get a response that is as warm as a January morning complete with wind chill? Move away, smile and start a conversation. This is not the end of the world and remember, if this is the most embarrassing moment of your life, consider yourself lucky.
5. Be yourself and at the same time be respectful of peoples' space. A hug is a combination of sincerity and expression. It cannot be taken back once it is given and can be reserved for a select few. We have all seen hugs combined with insincere concern or conversation but once it's done, it is out there for all to see.

Try not to be judgmental and remember the next time you feel awkward after a hug, a comment or an awkward question, give others the benefit of the doubt. If your personal goal is to make others comfortable your sincerity will come through in your actions.

Introductions

Are you comfortable introducing yourself or do you wait for the other person to make the first move? Introducing yourself is how you make yourself known to others.

How do you introduce yourself with confidence and authority? Take the initiative, walk up to someone, smile, make eye contact, extend your hand, say a greeting and your name.

What is an example of a good business introduction? A good business introduction includes your first and last name and something about yourself. Example: “Hello, my name is _____. I’m staff accountant at Wiley Widgets.”

When do you introduce yourself?

- When you recognize someone and he or she does not recognize you. Put the person at ease by introducing yourself and say where you met previously. Never say, “You don’t remember me, do you?”
- When you are at a business or social gathering, the fact that you both at the same function is sufficient reason to introduce yourself.
- When seated next to someone at a meeting or a banquet take the initiative and introduce yourself. Don’t wait for the other person. He or she may just sit there and say nothing.
- A friend of a friend. Say your name and tell the person of a specific connection. Example: I went school with your friend, _____.”
- If you are at a function and seated with others you haven’t met, take the initiative and go around the table to introduce yourself to others at the table even before you sit down. Remember to use your first and last name.

The Protocol of Introductions

- **Number one Rule.** The most important rule about introductions is to make them. If you are unsure of the “rules” or the proper order to introduce someone, don’t worry about it and do the best you can. It is far ruder not to make an introduction than it is to introduce people in the wrong order. Chances are the people you are meeting are also unsure. Even if they do know better, they should be polite enough not to say anything. The same rule applies to introducing yourself to others. Just do it!
- **Stand Up.** If you are seated, stand up to meet or greet someone and to make an introduction; it is a sign of respect. If you are meeting your friends or someone you see every day, you don’t need to stand up. A simple “Hello, how are you?” will do fine. If you are restricted in some way, perhaps you are seated behind a table and have no room to stand up fully, give a “fake” rise.
- **Make eye contact.** When you are meeting someone, look at the person and make eye contact. When introducing others you look at both parties as you make the introduction.
- **Smile.** A warm smile is our best communication tool. It is reciprocal. When you smile at someone, they smile back. In North America, a smile includes your eyes and showing your teeth.
- **Greeting.** The way you respond to an introduction says a lot about you. Just saying “Hi” is too casual in a business environment. Just “hello” is not enough. You need to say both your first and last name and the name of the person you are meeting. Say, “Hello Mr. Brown, I’m Louise Fox, it is a pleasure to meet you.” Extend your hand for a handshake. If you don’t know their name, this is the time to introduce yourself. When you give both your first and last name, they will as well.
- **Add Information.** When meeting or greeting, add information about yourself or the other person. “Hello Mr. Walcott, my name is _____. I am a new articling student with the firm. I am looking forward to working with you.”
- **Be First.** Take the lead. If the other person doesn’t introduce himself to you, take the lead and introduce yourself. Being the first to introduce yourself always makes you look very confident and in control. The key to feeling more confident is acting more confident.

- **Order of Precedence.** Introduce another person by mentioning the most important person's or the oldest person's name first. "Grandmother, I want you to meet my colleague Jamie Harvey, from work. Jamie, this is my grandmother Mrs. Jones." (It is a sign of respect to use the honorific rather than say this is my grandmother Mabel. Your friend Jamie would say, "It's a pleasure to meet you Mrs. Jones.")

Protocol:

Introduce the person of lesser importance TO the person of greater importance. "Mr. Big, I would like to introduce "TO YOU" Mr. Small, the head of the fax department in our Chicago office. (Think "Happy Birthday to you" in order to get the order of precedence correct.) A junior executive, is introduced TO a senior executive, a nonofficial TO an official person, and a fellow executive TO a client.

- **Use an honorific.** An honorific bestows honor... a sign of respect. An adult's last name is preceded by a title that could be Mr. Mrs. Ms or Miss. You should never use an adult's first name unless he or she has given you permission to do so. Never use an honorific for introducing yourself. Don't say, Hello my name is Mr. Jones... or Dr. Jones. In the latter case you would say, "My name is Dave Jones, I am a physician at St. Mary's hospital. If a person has a title such as Professor or Doctor, Reverend or Rabbi always use it. "It's a pleasure to meet you Professor Kaufman.
- **Introduce Everyone.** In addition to introducing yourself to someone, make sure you introduce all others in your group to each person when they do not know one another. In social situations, Hosting Behaviour sets you apart as a confident person. For example if you are seated at table where others are seated, introduce yourself to those seated, then when others arrive introduce yourself to them and then introduce them to the others at your table.
- **In Social Situations.** At home, when a guest enters the room for the first time, stand up. In a social situation, if seated at a dining table and a woman approaches the table to speak it is very courteous and chivalrous to stand. Also in a social situation when a woman from your table excuses herself from the table you should rise. When she returns you rise again and wait until she is seated before sitting down.

The number one rule of introductions is to make them, stand up, make eye contact and smile. Say the name of the most important person first, add information about the person or yourself, shake hands with a firm handshake and use an honorific unless asked to do otherwise. The six "S's" of introductions are "stand", "smile", "see" the other person's eyes, "shake", "say" your name and "say" their name back to them.

The Business of Business Cards

Excuse me, may I have your business card?

Did you have to search for it in your pocket, wallet or purse? Is it soiled, tattered perhaps even out of date? Perhaps you have to scratch out your phone number and write in your new number.

Why be concerned about the presentation or maintenance of your business cards? Because your business card speaks for you when you aren't present.

If you want your business card to shout, "Hey make use of me," then you'd better make sure it is professional looking and offered correctly.

In North America there are no hard and fast rules or rituals associated with the exchange of business cards as there may be in other countries, but there are some practical guidelines.

Your decision to present your card will depend on the situation and how well you are acquainted with the participants.

In a first encounter, you will likely present your card when it is most comfortable to do so. It usually signals the end of a first meeting and indicates you may be willing to continue dialogue at another time.

Sometimes it is done at the beginning of a meeting. For instance if you are a visitor you may present your card to the receptionist and then present another to the host. In these cases the card functions like social calling cards did in the old days, announcing your identity, your presence, and intention to conduct business.

In group situations, receiving cards at the beginning of a meeting can help keep a cast of characters straight. If there are a number of people in a meeting or you are unsure of someone's correct name or title, you can ask for cards before the meeting starts and adopt the Japanese custom of spreading them out on the table.

What do you say when you swap cards? Say, "Do you have a business card?" or "May I have your business card?" When you present your card you might say: "Here's my card—please call me if you have any other questions or would like additional information about my services."

If you wish to offer your card to a long time associate, you can say, "Did I ever give you my card?" or "I've been meaning to give you my card."

It is not polite to refuse a request for your card. If you really don't want someone to have your card you might just say, "I'm sorry, I neglected to bring them with me," or "I'm sorry, I am all out at the moment." However, if you do that, make sure you don't give your card to anyone else.

Politely accept any card that is offered; you can throw it out later if you don't want it. Say thank you, examine it briefly and make an observational comment such as, "Oh I see you have an office in New York." When you receive a card, put it in your jacket or purse/wallet, never in your hip/back pocket.

Here are the basic business card etiquette tips:

- Present your card so the print faces the recipient.
- During an office visit if the host does not offer a card, as the guest you can request one before leaving. If cards are in a holder, ask first before taking one.
- Carry cards to a social event in case the opportunity to network presents itself but don't turn a garden party into a sales presentation. In a group or party situation, card exchange should be private.
- Don't hand out your card during a meal; wait until it's over. Don't give out cards during a private dinner party unless asked to do so and then do the exchange discreetly. It can blur the business/social lines of the situation.

- It is unprofessional to pass out your business cards as if you were dealing at a poker game. You want your card to be respected and valued, which it won't be if it is randomly distributed. An appropriate card exchange most often occurs between two individuals at a time. Be selective. Your policy should fall somewhere between handing out your cards indiscriminately which devalues them and hoarding them which defeats the purpose.
- Enclose your card when forwarding materials. However, it is not appropriate to enclose a business card with correspondence that has personal or emotional content such as a note of condolence.
- The protocol of exchanging business cards follows that of the handshake. Usually the senior or higher ranking person starts the process. Wait for the senior executive to ask for your card first. It is impolite to ask for the card of someone of higher rank than yourself. Think twice before approaching the CEO of your client's corporation and asking for his or her card. Wait to be introduced. It shows respect for both your client and the CEO.
- Make sure your cards are readily available in a pocket or briefcase. A card case is a good investment. It keeps your cards neat and adds to your professional demeanor.
- To avoid fumbling in pockets or purses always keep cards in the same place. A good location is the inside pocket of your suit or jacket.

Follow these suggestions and your business card will be one of your best assets.

Nametag Etiquette

You may not like to wear a nametag but there are times where convenience vastly outweighs the awkwardness of writing your name under “Hello my name is.”

Where is the most convenient place to wear your nametag? Wear a pin-on or clip-on nametag on your right shoulder. Why? Because when you shake hands, using your right hand and making eye contact of course, the nametag on your right shoulder is directly in your line of site. Emotional items such as a Remembrance Day poppy, medals, a boutonniere are worn over your heart.

If you are attending a convention, don't wear your nametag outside the convention hall. Slip it inside your pocket or purse when you go to and from meetings.

If your nametag is not preprinted and you have to write it yourself, don't write “Mr.,” “Mrs.,” or Ms. in front of your name. A professional title such as “Dr.” may be added depending on how much you wish to advertise your credentials.

At business events, unless the event includes only fellow employees, it is appropriate to add your job title under your name and company name.

When it comes to spouses attending a company event, a spouse's nametag should include the company members name placed in brackets on the second line, “Donna Jones” followed by “(James Jones).” If a female spouse has retained her own name, the tag should read “Nancy Black” with “(Mrs. Greg Parker)” below.

Remember though, wearing a nametag doesn't excuse you from taking the initiative to introduce yourself to others.

Business Correspondence

Statistics show that on average we spend 30% of our work time engaging in written communication. This would include email, faxes, letters, memos etc. Here are some tips to maximize that 30%

1. Practice good penmanship! The time and energy you spend handwriting is of little value if the receiver cannot read your writing. Choose blue or black ink, space your words and sentences appropriately and remember brevity is the key to good business communication.
2. The appearance and quality of the stationery you choose will leave an impression. Do not send formal correspondence on mismatched, soiled, once-used or “wrinkled” paper.
3. Double check that the letter or card is addressed properly. Use complete, formal names and include titles when available. Always include a return address.
4. For children under age 12, the use of “Master” for boys and “Miss” for girls is still appropriate.
5. Try not to use “silly” stationery or cards/envelopes with jokes or characters, which could be construed as offensive. Plain is best.
6. When writing for business focus on the business priority first and leave any pleasantries to the end.
7. Do not mix business and pleasure. Business cards do not belong with social correspondence.
8. Try to send thank you notes within 36 hours of the occasion. You may telephone or e-mail a thank you for very casual things or small niceties; however, a written thank you is always better.
9. Always RSVP. Etiquette dictates that you respond in the same manner as you receive an invitation. That means, if you were invited by phone, you may RSVP by phone. If you received a formal written invitation, you must formally respond in writing.
10. Notes, especially for congratulations or condolence should be handwritten and original. A photocopy or form letter, handwriting done by computer font, or carbon copy signatures, are not personal enough when handwriting is called for. Take time to do it right and you’ll be glad you did.

Writing Personal Notes in Business

Writing a personal note either socially or in business is a powerful tool. In our high tech low touch world, people respond to a personal note differently than to other means of communication. Taking a few minutes of your time to write a note makes a high impact connection with another person. And that's what business today is all about; making connections, developing relationships and being thoughtful about other people's needs.

In his best selling book on networking "Dig your Well Before You're Thirsty," Harvey Mackay discusses the use of the business note by many of today's top business leaders.

One senior partner of an international accounting firm starts his week off sending out various newspaper and magazine clippings with a personal note attached to interested clients and colleagues. Why bother? Because not only does this say "I was thinking of you and thought you might enjoy this article," it also keeps your name in front of a perspective client you may be courting without being too obvious about it. It is a personal touch that gives you that extra edge and sets you apart from the competition.

One of the reasons notes are a terrific business tool is that they are short. In the age of information overload, people may not read a two page letter. The beauty of a note is just that, it's a note. It takes only a second to read and a few minutes to write.

Here are a few tips for writing a personal note:

1. Consider your purpose. Ask yourself how well you know the person, why you are writing and what is the outcome you want to achieve. Write a note to congratulate, to motivate, to console, to inform, to sell, to remind, to support, to connect, to stay in touch, to celebrate and of course, to thank.
2. Send business related clippings that may be of interest but also consider clippings that focus on a person's personal hobbies or interests. How might you know this information? When you meet someone, look around their office. The golf memorabilia, hockey trophy, antique clock, even the diploma on the wall are a source of free information about that person
3. Write conversationally, simply and clearly. If you wouldn't say it, then don't write it.
4. Avoid workspeak and jargon that may be particular to your own business but not others.

5. Be cautious with humor. Often it misses the mark and is misinterpreted, especially in situations of cultural diversity.
6. Send a hand written note unless your penmanship makes your writing unreadable. Keep your notes neat and use correct grammar.

Thank you Notes

1. Send a thank you note to people who do something thoughtful for you such as take you to lunch or dinner, give you a gift, give you tickets to an event or game, send business your way, interview you or recommend you for a job.
2. Don't start a thank you note with "Thank you"; it makes it seem obligatory. Say something about the thoughtfulness of the giver, name the gift (if there was one), say something nice about the gift, say what you will do with the gift, use a nice closing and sign your name.
3. Send a thank you note immediately after a job interview. If you don't get the job, send a thank you reiterating your interest should another position become available.
4. Send a thank you to your clients and customers for their continued loyalty.
5. An e-mail thank you falls into the better than nothing category. A hand written thank you note is much more impressive and sets you apart from the competition.
6. When should you send a thank you note? As soon as possible after the occasion, gift or interview.

Professional Presence

The Secrets of Professionals

It does not matter whether your chosen field is botany or bifocals, professionals in business need to understand what behaviors are expected and accepted in every possible business situation. It does not matter how many degrees you have or how many years you've been on the job, sooner or later a lack of social intelligence will cost you. Your behaviors are constantly under examination and you'll need to be conscious of how your actions are affecting your reputation at all times.

- **Be direct and to the point.** Professionals who respect themselves and others should always be direct and to the point. Think before you speak and practice your listening skills.
- **Be adaptable.** Leaders recognize that adapting to change is necessary and most often leads to a positive outcome. They also know that reliance does not mean showing weakness or being indecisive.
- **Risky business.** Rarely does anyone get anywhere in life without taking a risk or two. Risk in business means considering whether you can afford not to take a particular chance and weighing the consequences before you make decisions. Smart professionals watch and learn in an effort to learn from the mistakes of others, rather than making the mistakes themselves.
- **Be open for business.** Leaders are open-minded. They are good listeners and hesitate to dismiss any logically presented idea. Progressive professionals are open to new ideas and are often the first in line to learn new tasks and try new things.
- **Be prepared.** Take the time to research and put the necessary information into a professional, productive format. If you are not prepared, don't make excuses and don't expect others to cover for you.
- **Know your product.** Know your client. No one is going to buy your product if you cannot speak intelligently about it or present it effectively. Make a point of finding out what exactly your client needs and adapt your product accordingly.
- **Be energized.** Feeling and acting energized is a sure way to show others you feel positively about who you are and what you're trying to do. You cannot expect others to be energized or excited about being around you if you are not positive and exciting to be around.

- **Anticipate.** Leaders solve many problems by anticipating them before they happen. Have a plan and think it through. Don't leave things to chance and keep your cool if things happen to get out of control.
- **Believe you can.** If you want to be the leader, you have to believe you can be. Act confidently and you will look, feel and BE confident.

Steps to Professional Presence

- **Be on Time.** Courteous conduct includes demonstrating respect for the other person's time. When you honor someone's schedule, you honor that person as well. You should always consider the other person's schedule when scheduling appointments. When it comes to your own schedule, you know being late gives others a negative impression of you before they have even met you. It is guaranteed to start you off on the wrong foot.

Avoid being late by scheduling meetings further apart, so if one meeting runs over you will not be late for the next. Estimate how long something will really take rather than how long you hope it will take. On a personal level, strive to be more organized, leave earlier, assemble materials in advance or set your clock ahead.

- **Understand business etiquette.** Practice courtesy and treat others with respect, courtesy and consideration. Follow the four E's rule; treat every person, in every situation, with exactly the same respect and consideration, every time.

Be aware of how your actions affect others. If someone does something you don't like, don't do it yourself. Offer assistance without gender consideration. Business etiquette is gender neutral so if someone needs help, needs a door opened or some assistance, you help them regardless if they are a man or a woman. Avoid any action that could be considered racist, sexist or discriminatory. Follow the rules of good office etiquette.

- **Package yourself like a professional.** Dress appropriately for the occasion and for your job, the climate, the culture and of course the circumstance. Be mindful of first impressions.

When you walk into a room your manners, mannerisms and clothing are on display. People judge your confidence and ability based on that first impression. It is the energy you bring into the room and the confidence and initiative you demonstrate, that determines your professional presence.

Your clothing, posture and body language say a lot about you. Just as you are judging others, they are judging you. What you wear to your job is referred to as performance attire. Before you venture out, ask yourself, "What am I going to be doing today?" and dress accordingly. When you are poorly dressed people notice your clothing. When you are well dressed, they notice you. Being appropriately dressed takes your clothing out of the equation and lets you and your positive personality shine. The rule is "dress for the job you want not the job you have... that is dress one notch up"

- **Present yourself as a professional.** Establish effective nonverbal communication and learn the language of presence, posture, handshakes and eye contact. Introduce yourself to others with eye contact, a smile, your name and a firm handshake. Give an interesting 30-second commercial about yourself. This is sometimes called an elevator speech or a commercial. It should explain what you do, whom you do it for and how what you do benefits others, makes their life easier or more fun. It should be interesting enough that people say, “Tell me More,” not “So what” or “ho hum.” “I sell insurance,” or “I help people protect their families future,”... I think the latter sounds much more interesting. I am an etiquette coach... vs. I sell confidence so people can feel more comfortable and confident in business and social situations.

Introduce others using their name and according to established protocol, power and precedence. Use people’s name and an honorific, Mr. Miss, Mrs. or Ms until they give you permission to do otherwise. Say the name of the most important person first. Give some information about the person you are introducing, “Mr. Boss I would like you to meet my new colleague, Mary Smith who is the director of communication in the Dallas office. She was responsible for the new initiatives in marketing and sales.”

- **Master your mingleability and make connections.** Use space, territory, mirroring and matching to make connection with others. Human beings are territorial by nature and an unwritten protocol exists for every action and interaction from how to meet and greet people to where to sit when visiting someone’s office. Understanding this protocol is a show of respect to others. It provides the foundation for creating rapport and building trust. Social and cultural differences provide the guideline for appropriate space and territory protocol. The safest comfort zone for most individuals is three to six feet. This means you should strategically plan seating arrangements and be consciously aware of body position to gain maximum presence and create the atmosphere for the message you want to communicate.

If you call someone into your office for a meeting and sit on one side of the desk with your guest on the opposite side, the desk acts as a barrier and this might be perceived as a power play. If

you sit side by side or facing each other about 4–5 feet apart at roughly a 10 degree angle, you create a more congenial atmosphere.

We build rapport quickly with those who have manners and mannerisms similar to our own. Subtly match and mirror or “ape” those you are conversing with. If someone is calm, slow down and stay controlled with smoother, less emphatic gestures. Show high spirit and enthusiasm when the other person demonstrates it.

Be prepared to communicate with others in social situations, engage in small talk, network effectively by introducing yourself and others and follow through to build relationships. Knowing how to make an entrance, work the room, engage in small talk, shake hands with people you meet and network effectively builds relationships.

- **Use positive respectful language.** Use positive language that reflects a positive attitude. People are attracted to others who have a positive attitude. A positive attitude is reflected in how you look, your body language, what you say and how you say it.

The brain works better with positive information. When I say don’t fall in the lake, you don’t picture yourself not falling in the lake, you picture yourself falling in the lake.

In business you must be aware of how you use language and get into the habit of speaking positively. A negative style of explaining can get you labeled as negative and tagged as a pessimist. It also affects your attitude and the consequently how others feel about you.

- **Brush up on dining etiquette.** Dining etiquette is still the number one indicator of good manners and polish. In business 46% of successful business transactions are concluded over a meal. A lunch or dinner in a fine restaurant can become an important part of the interview process of building relationships with clients and customers. Your future employer doesn’t take you out to eat because he thinks you are hungry or thirsty. He is assessing your social skills and how comfortable you are. If you have poor table manners, your interviewer might ask himself, “If you skipped learning this very basic skill... what else did you skip learning?” When dining with clients and customers you want to feel comfortable dining so your clients feel comfortable with you and you can focus on the business at hand without worrying about which fork to use.

- **Master your virtual presence.** Practice good netiquette. Remember your virtual presence creates an important first impression that could make the difference in whether a relationship will continue to grow. Reflect your professional image in your e-mail messages by using good grammar and proper spelling in all your messages. Avoid too casual or too familiar writing style in a business setting. Remember e-mail is never private; it belongs to your employer and is a permanent inerasable document with your name on it. It is a reflection of your professional image and that of your company.

Respect others when using your cell phone BlackBerry or other technology. Remember the person you are with takes precedence over anyone on the phone. Avoid taking a call in public places and excuse yourself to make calls in private.

- **Be Consistent.** Practice what you preach. To be trusted and believed you cannot say one thing and do another. You will be branded a phony who is not to be trusted. Your image; how you look, speak and act must be consistent and congruent to garner trust, respect and convey professionalism.

First Impressions

More than twenty years ago John Naisbitt, in his book *Mega Trends* wrote about a future world focused on high tech yet longing for high touch. This high tech world would place us away from our nuclear families, communicating with others via faxes, cell phones and e-mails rather than face to face. Driving in an out of our homes using garage door openers without interaction with our neighbors. The new way of living, working and communicating would create a void of connection with others.

Sound familiar? Yet our brain responds 60,000 times faster to the stimuli of face-to-face human contact than with non face-to-face contact. The need to make a positive lasting first impression is more important than ever before.

When we walk into a room our clothing, our manners, and mannerisms are on display. People assess our confidence and ability on those first few seconds of information. Communication research has shown that within the first one-thousandth of a second of meeting you, those on the receiving end have already started making judgements about you. Within 7 seconds, they are already trying to determine whether they like and trust you, and whether you appear confident and qualified. If they can't decide within that time frame, they spend the next thirty to sixty seconds going through a critical checklist in their heads about you. Do you know what you're talking about? Are you a potential hire? Are you ready for promotion? Are you worth talking to for another ten minutes?

You must be able to present yourself in a positive light. Manners impact of how others perceive you whatever your company position. Your attire may be holding you back from promotion, you may be embarrassed or afraid to take clients out to lunch, you may be awkward when engaging in conversations other than business so cannot put your clients at ease. You may look good, but your non-verbal cues are not congruent with your language.

When you are socially awkward, nervous or lack confidence, it makes others uncomfortable. Is that the impression you want to create? Probably not, because what ever the first impression is, it is usually a lasting one. You may not get a second chance to make that first impression.

If you don't get the contract or fail to close the sale your clients or customers may tell you they found a better deal or a better price but they never say it was because you were lacking in social skills or you had poor table manners, were inappropriately dressed or ... they didn't feel comfortable with you. People do business with those they know- people they feel comfortable with and people they trust and like.

If you start out on the wrong foot, you spend valuable time trying to dig your way out of a bad impression. It's much easier to begin by letting others see you the way you want them to and spending the rest of your time focusing on them rather than worrying about what they are thinking about you. The sooner you master those precious first few seconds, the better your interactions will be.

Because 55% of the message received by others is non-verbal, keep in mind the following non-verbal cues:

- **Smile:** Your smile is your most important facial expression. It draws people to you, inspires confidence and understanding and can change someone's impression of you. It makes other people feel good and makes you feel good too. So turn that frown upside down and give a warm, sincere smile that lights up your face and eyes. Let your smile work for you.
- **Eyes:** When facing others keep eye contact approximately three to eight seconds per person. The smaller the group, the longer the contact but never more than 60% of the time. If someone doesn't make eye contact, drops their gaze to the floor or looks over your shoulder, generally they're thought to be shy, lacking confidence or not interested.
- **Posture:** Your posture reflects your energy level and confidence. Whether sitting, standing walking, shaking hands or giving a toast, successful people carry themselves well. When a person is nervous, they either stand stiffly like a soldier at attention or round shouldered like an ape. Stand as if you have a taut string running from the top of your head to the ceiling and glide purposefully into the room with an air of grace, competence and dignity that says, "I believe in myself and what I have to say."

- **Voice:** Confidence in yourself and what you're saying is reflected in your voice, the primary vehicle for conveying enthusiasm, interest and setting a conversational tone. Focus on speaking from the diaphragm and say what you have to say with conviction and confidence.
- **Dress:** Your clothes are one of the first things people notice about you. When it comes to your career how you dress need to be a strategic consideration. Dress according to the culture of your business and the expectations of your clients or customers. When you are poorly dressed people focus on your clothing, when you are well-dressed people focus on you.
- **Grooming:** Well groomed is a clean and polished look from the ground up. It makes a huge difference in how we are perceived by others. Keep in mind too that the details are important. The effect of a good suit is lost if the shoes are scruffy and not polished.

Office Etiquette Tips

Do we really need to worry about office etiquette? I believe we do if you consider the number one cause of stress in the work place was co-workers' annoying habits. Here are a few tips on office etiquette:

Courtesy

Recall the manners you learned in kindergarten and start applying them in the work place. Remember to say, "good morning," "please," "thank you," "may I" and "excuse me, "you're welcome" and "I'm sorry." Follow the golden rule and treat others as you wish to be treated, with respect and courtesy.

Say hello to colleagues in the morning and good night when you leave the office. Acknowledge those you don't know with a smile and a nod or take a moment to introduce yourself.

If you have a visitor in your office, give them your full attention. You can't be attentive to another person when you are reading your e-mail. You may think of it as multi-tasking, but it is really just bad manners.

Think about how your actions affect others and if something others are doing bothers you, avoid doing it yourself!

Change

Change is a necessary part of the development of every business. Decisions will be made without your input or advice based on information you may not be privy to. Keep an open mind, maintain a positive attitude, listen, ask questions and get all the facts before jumping to conclusions or spreading negativity.

Decorating

What do Beanie Babies®, Elvis posters, lava lamps and other funky decorations have in common? They don't belong in a professional work environment. When decorating your "personal" space, keep it simple and limit it to a few tasteful items.

Be aware of the kind of image you want to portray to your co-workers and customers. People will judge your level of professionalism based on what they see in your surroundings. Keep your office tidy or others may question the quality of your work.

Keep the cartoons, inspirational quotes and jokes to a minimum as others may be offended on moral, cultural, religious or sexual grounds.

Ask about company policy regarding plants before bringing one to work. Because plants often provoke allergies, bring insects, leak and don't always respond well to office environments, consider just an artificial plant or forget it altogether.

Desk Top Dining

Consider having lunch away from your desk. Studies have shown that taking time to eat your lunch away from your desk results in greater productivity.

According to a 2002 study conducted at the University of Arizona, the average desk has 400 times more bacteria than the average toilet seat! Crumbs can attract insects or rodents and spills could potentially be hazardous around computer equipment and keyboards or on original documents.

Employees who eat at their desk are regarded as less professional by their coworkers even if they also eat at their desk. Chewing with an open mouth, scattering crumbs everywhere and inhaling one's food are not the signs of a polished professional.

The smell of both hot and cold food wafting over the cubicle, rustling of lunch wrappers, crunching of apples and other crisp foods, are all disturbing to others. The smell of microwave popcorn can be especially offensive and can invade a whole floor of offices. It should be avoided altogether unless you are prepared to share it with everyone.

Differences

Recognize that there are distinct personality types, and people work, act and communicate in different ways. Be prepared to adjust your communication style to work more effectively with others and build rapport and trust. Remember there can be more than one way to complete a task or reach a goal.

Never criticize others in public and always carry on constructive evaluations or critiques in private. Focus on the positive not just the negative. Be prepared to give others the benefit of the doubt.

Treat employees of the opposite sex as business professionals and don't expect them to do "old fashioned female chores" such as making the coffee or serving cookies.

Electronic Equipment

Tone down your audio volume controls. Don't use your speakerphone when retrieving voice mail, use headphones if listening to music and turn off the audio on your e-mail, your pager or your blackberry. Don't leave your cell phone on in your cubicle when you aren't there.

Put your Blackberry and cell phone on vibrate when attending meetings and excuse yourself if you must take a call.

Avoid talking on your cell phone, texting or using your Blackberry when in the company of others. The most important person is the person you are with, take or make calls in private.

If you are using the copy machine or other equipment and it jams or runs out of paper, take care of it or call for service. Don't just leave it for the next person.

Gossip

Avoid engaging in office gossip. The gossip chain starts when an employee overhears just a portion of a conversation, forms an opinion and passes their version along. They were not privy to the whole picture, the background information or what led up to the decision. They spread only bite-size pieces of information that has been taken out of context. Gossip creates a toxic atmosphere of distrust. When others hear you gossiping they wonder what you say about them behind their backs.

Language

Use professional language at all times. It is never appropriate to swear or use crude, sexist or discriminatory language in the workplace.

Be careful about the style of humor you use in the workplace. Some people think sarcastic humor is funny, but most people do not. In fact, most people don't get it unless they're sarcastic, too. If you share an off colour joke with a friend, others may overhear it and this could result in a sexual harassment or discrimination lawsuit.

As a visitor, at the end of the meeting shake hands with other meeting participants and thank the meeting chair or convener.

If you are from outside the company, write a hand written thank you note to the person who invited you to the meeting and a note to the chair. This sets you apart from the competition.

Personal

Avoid heavy perfume or aftershave. If you can smell it on yourself, you have overdone it. Because of allergies, many offices have a no-scent policy. Smelly gym bags and old sneakers can be just as offensive.

Don't bring your germs to work. The first few days are when an illness is most contagious. If you are sick, stay home. No one appreciates your coughing or sneezing and no one wants to catch what you have and take it home to his or her family.

Privacy

Don't hang around a co-workers cubicle or office chit chatting, waiting for them to get off the phone or finish a conversation with someone else. When you are on the phone, it is very distracting to have someone looking over your shoulder or loitering within earshot. If you have time to chitchat in the hallway, perhaps you don't have enough work to do.

Limit personal calls to emergency calls only. If you have to make a call of a personal or sensitive nature, go elsewhere to call during your break or lunch hour, never during business hours.

If you are discussing a confidential matter do it in a meeting room or private space. Whispering is just as distracting and is annoying and insulting to others around you. Sometimes people are more tempted to eavesdrop if they hear whispering. If you do overhear a private conversation, keep it to yourself.

Don't be a jack in the box. This is someone who sticks their head up over the cubicle wall and constantly interrupts you with things such as "Got any tape?", "Want a coffee?", "Have you had lunch?" You should treat the cubicle as if the walls went all the way to the ceiling. Walk around the corner to ask a question. Equally annoying is the person who just talks or asks a question assuming you know he is talking to you. If you hear someone asking a question not directed at you resist the urge to answer.

Don't barge into a co-workers' cubicle or office and take a seat without first asking if it is a convenient time. Knock on the wall or door first and say, "Excuse me." If your co-worker invites you to enter but doesn't suggest you take a seat, chances are you are interrupting and they want you to be brief.

Speak softly. Be aware that a loud voice is distracting to your co-workers and can make it difficult for them to concentrate on their tasks.

Problems

Try to solve problems with co-workers, such as personality conflicts and minor irritations, at the lowest possible level. Do not take every little problem to the supervisor. State objections calmly and deal with differences as tactfully.

Property

Even though staplers, tape, scissors, pens and pencils may be company property, this does not give you the right to walk into a cubicle or office and lift these items off a co-worker's desk. If you must borrow an item, always return it promptly. If you need supplies, get them from the storeroom or office services.

Meeting Etiquette

Meetings have been the butt of jokes for years. What do you do if you have don't know what to do? If you're bored? If you want to show who's boss? If you want to seem diligent without actually doing any work? You have a meeting!

Sometimes the bad reputation meetings have is well deserved. However, if you practice meeting etiquette, whether you are the planner, the chairperson or a participant, you can be an asset to your organization by conducting effective and productive meetings. Successful meetings are brief, focused and productive.

Action is the objective of any meeting. They happen by design not by accident. Ego building and posturing never accomplish anything productive. Professionalism helps transform meetings from empty time-waster into creative events. Here are some tips to help make your meetings successful.

- **Determine your goals and objectives.** You need a clear purpose for a successful meeting so ask yourself what you hope to accomplish and if a meeting will help you accomplish this goal. A meeting is a good way to disseminate information, but if you aren't interested in others' opinions or don't want to generate discussion, an e-mail may be more efficient.
- **Prepare an agenda before the meeting.** Outline what topics you will cover, who should be prepared to handle each subject and a time estimate for discussion of each topic. If you are chairing the meeting the agenda puts you in the driver's seat. Distribute the agenda to participants before the meeting so they can come prepared. Include the time and place of the meeting and a list of all the attendees.
- **Start the meeting on time.** Practicing civility in the workplace means you respect everyone's valuable time. Don't delay the meeting waiting for late comers. If there are late comers, don't waste everyone's time repeating what you have already covered. You or a colleague can bring them up to date up at the end of the meeting.
- **Know the Rules.** Familiarize yourself with some of the basic steps of procedure in "Robert's Rules of Order." Even if you hold informal meetings you still must follow some basic procedures for discussion, recognizing who has the floor and reaching and implementing decisions.

- **Keep the discussions on topic.** New topics should be tabled for another meeting.
- **Record minutes.** If you are the chairperson, it is your responsibility to ensure that notes or minutes are taken either by you, a secretary or another person appointed to do it. Notes should include decisions that are made, courses of action to be followed after the meeting and who is responsible for carrying out the action and time for completion.

Don't interrupt other speakers or ridicule their opinions, either verbally by snickering or sighing or through body language such as rolling your eyes.

Adjourn the meeting on time and follow up decisions that were made and actions that were decided.

Tips for the Meeting Participant

Here are a few tips to help make you a savvy meeting participant.

- Arrive several minutes ahead of time.
- Introduce yourself to other participants and present your business card, especially if you are from outside the company.
- Come prepared with assignments completed, a copy of the agenda and notations of any questions or discussion points you might want to raise.
- If you are a visitor, ask where you should sit.
- Sit as close to the leader as protocol permits as it implies closeness in ideas and values.
- Be attentive and willing to participate. Respect the leader by avoiding offside conversations with others while someone is speaking.
- Follow the leader and inconspicuously mirror the energy level of your superior.
- Sit with erect posture and don't slump. Keep your arms on the table and lean forward slightly to show interest. Moving even slightly physically closer increases the sense of involvement.
- If coffee, refreshments or lunch are served, be prepared to serve yourself if indicated. Remember the purpose and focus of the meeting is not the food and drink. Don't over indulge or comment if the food or service are not first class.
- Demonstrate good energy and involvement. High energy is contagious and a valuable quality in a team player. Quiet energy and good listening skills are also valued.
- Don't create subconscious, non-verbal barriers to communication such as crossing your arms.
- Keep your comments and questions concise and relevant; don't ramble on. Discuss but don't argue. Breaking up arguments is counter productive, wastes time and tarnishes reputations. At the same time don't be afraid to take a stand if you know what you are talking about and it doesn't directly contradict the leader.
- Pick up your personal items and papers after the meeting. Leave your area just as you found it.
- At the end of the meeting, shake hands with other meeting participants and thank the meeting chair or convener.
- If you are from outside the company, write a hand written thank you note to the person who invited you to the meeting and a note to the chair.