BASIC BUSINESS ETIQUETTE FROM A to Z

This guide will inform you of the subtle nuances of dining, speaking, leaving messages, mingling, and making a good impression in business settings. Follow these simple rules and you are sure to have positive professional relationships. And yes, you will still have room to be creative, spontaneous, and uniquely you!

**Attire**
When you're meeting a potential employer or networking with others, you want to project a professional image. You don't necessarily have to wear a suit, but your clothes should be neat and clean. Choosing clothing that is consistent with the attire of the people you will be interacting with will make everyone feel more comfortable. Select professional shoes, bags, or portfolios to complete your professional image.

**Business Cards**
Consider obtaining a small amount of business cards for the purposes of networking. Your business card will be your first opportunity to impress someone with your professionalism. Your card should include your contact information (name, address, cell phone, and professional email address). When you exchange cards, be sure to write notes on the back of the cards you receive to remind you of the details of your interaction.

**Cell Phones**
Do not simply silence your cell phone. Turn off your cell phone when you are interacting with someone or in a meeting. If you must take a call during a meeting, be sure to excuse yourself to take care of the details of the call.

**Dining**
Business lunches are not really about eating, but more about your interactions with others. Order food that is reasonably priced and easy to eat. No matter what your host does, refrain from drinking alcohol or smoking. Review the formal place setting below to understand the purpose of the utensils, plates, and glasses.

**Email**
Your email address is as important as the message. Keep in professional. Emoticons should not be used in professional emails. The same rules apply for punctuation and capitalization as when you write a paper for class. Use the subject field to clearly and concisely describe the content of your message. Be very judicious when using “reply all” or copying and blind copying others on messages. Make sure the people receiving your message really do need to be kept in the loop. Always proofread your message carefully prior to hitting send.
First Impressions
Communicate with your entire body. Stand when someone enters the room, make eye contact, smile and shake the person’s hand firmly, but without crushing fingers. Create your 30-second commercial describing who you are and what you do. Listen attentively, don’t interrupt, and don’t monopolize the conversation.

Gratitude
Acknowledge others for their assistance and attention to you. You should always follow up professional interactions with a thank you letter or email.

Holiday Cards
If you choose to send holiday cards, link the occasion with your message. Express how grateful you are for the professional relationship you have developed.

Introductions
Do you have trouble remembering names? Many people do! Try restating the person’s name after you are introduced (i.e. It’s a pleasure to meet you, Tom.) You can help others remember your name by stating it slowly and clearly. Wear your nametag on the right side of your jacket or shirt. When you are speaking to someone and another person you know walks up, always make introductions.

Jokes
Humor is tricky in the workplace. Avoid off-color jokes, comments based on religion, gender, race, or sexual preference, and snide or sarcastic remarks. Don’t send or forward jokes via email. Don’t use jokes as a form of criticism. Stay good-natured and positive. An affable personality will make those around you feel more comfortable.

Keeping Confidentiality
When a colleague tells you something privately, assume he or she means for your ears only. If the person wants others to know, he or she will make that decision. Don’t gossip or spread rumors in the workplace.

Listening
Listening means more than waiting for your turn to talk. Concentrate on the other person’s words and don’t let your mind wander. You may miss a point and then ask a question that has already been addressed. Be an active listener and use body language to show you’re paying attention – smile, nod, or agree as appropriate. Learn how to read other people’s nonverbal cues that you’ve lost their attention or talked too long.

Meetings
Timing is everything, especially when you have called a meeting. Start the session on time and keep on task. Be sure to specify an end time so attendees can plan their schedules accordingly. If you have too much to cover for the allotted time, reserve a few moments at the end of the meeting to arrange another meeting. Be sure to prepare well for all meetings whether you are running the meeting or attending.

Negativity
Negativity is like a virus – it spreads. While denial of an obvious problem is not productive, it is far better to identify what is wrong and collaborate on a solution. If you are not satisfied with your job, talk with your manager. It is your responsibility to inform him or her that you are dissatisfied. You do not want that information to make its way through the grapevine. News shared by gossip is often viewed as being more negative than positive.

Office Politics
Paying attention to political undercurrents may help you navigate challenging situations, but avoid becoming directly involved in office politics. Watch for the overly ambitious who may do whatever it takes to advance their careers, even if it means saying unkind or untrue things about another coworker. Maintain cordial, but professional relationships with supervisors and coworkers. Don’t share personal details about your life – a little distance is healthy.

Presentations
Even the most seasoned performers rehearse their acts before showtime. To uncover potential glitches, do the same using as many variables as possible. Double-check your content for accuracy and make certain all visuals are correct. Follow the Golden Rule: Present unto others as you would like others to present unto you. Speak clearly and audibly, don’t exceed the time limit, and allow time for questions.
**Quitting**

Give at least two weeks notice. Be prepared to leave that day if your company prefers to transition roles more quickly. Plan your departure so that it is a smooth transition for those you are leaving behind. Leave on the best possible terms, even if the feeling is acrimonious. Avoid expressing anger at your boss or coworkers. Use the exit interview to offer honest and constructive feedback.

**R.S.V.P.**

When R.S.V.P. is printed on an invitation, you must contact the host to either accept or decline. Correct head counts allow the host to accurately account for food, seating, handouts, etc. Do your utmost to respond by the date indicated on your invitation. Do not wait until the last minute.

**Speakerphones**

Always ask permission before placing a caller on speakerphone. Never put someone on if they are unaware that others can hear the conversation. At the beginning of a conference call, introduce all participants by name and role with your company. Unless your voice is familiar to all participants, introduce yourself each time you speak. Likewise, if you are addressing a question to someone on the other end, use his or her name to avoid confusion.

**Telephone Manners**

If you are making a call and a receptionist or assistant answers, identify yourself and your company first. Then ask to speak with the person you are trying to reach. When you call someone, always make sure they have the time to speak with you before you launch into the subject at hand. When leaving a voice message, clearly state your name, phone number, company, and the reason for your call. Repeat your name and number at the conclusion of your message. Your voicemail greeting should contain your name, company name, and extension. Change your greeting to reflect extended absences and direct people to another contact in your absence. Remember to update your greeting when you return.

**Utensils When Dining**

Work from the outside in, starting with the first course. For example, your salad fork is on the far left of your plate. The one you use with your entrée is to the right. Dessert utensils are placed at the top of your plate. Put used silverware on your plate and not directly on the tablecloth. If you drop a piece of your silverware, do not pick it up. Instead, ask the server for a replacement. When finished with your meal, place your knife and fork across the top of your plate.

**Vacation Planning**

Leave your workspace well organized and clean. Make sure someone knows where your important documents and files are located, if needed. You don’t need to tell people where you are going, but you do need to tell them you will be gone. Update your voicemail and email to reflect your absence and return.

**Working a Room**

To start a conversation, approach someone standing alone or a group of three or more. Do not interrupt a discussion between two people. Read the newspaper, listen to talk radio, or check your favorite online news site before going to a networking function. Knowledge of current events will make you feel more confident. Develop a one to two sentence statement that describes what you do. Be careful not to talk too much about yourself.

**Xerography**

Be judicious with your copies! If it does not need to be copied, refrain from making unnecessary copies. Never copy personal documents at work. If you use the last paper in the copy machine, refill the tray. The same goes for toner. Don’t walk away from a paper jam. Get help if you cannot fix it yourself. If you have a lengthy copy job, let your coworkers know so they can plan accordingly.

**Year-end Gift Giving**

If you are unsure of a recipient’s tastes, consider a gift card to a coffee house, bookstore, or general interest store. Because many people have dietary restrictions, be careful with gifts of food. Consider a gift that keeps giving. Make a contribution to the recipient’s favorite charity. You will support a worthy cause while recognizing and appreciating the recipient.

**Zeal**

If you show genuine excitement about your work, everyone will enjoy working with or for you, making for a pleasant, productive business environment. Let your enthusiasm come through in your facial expression and your overall style. You will be perceived as a confident, competent, talented professional.

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