Bulletin Board: Proper etiquette matters in the workplace

by Amy_Winter

Now that times are tougher with the economic downturn, it seems more companies are focusing on business manners. It pays to be more polite to workers and clients, according to Lydia Ramsey, author of "Manners that Sell." Proper manners include knowing the rules for company features like e-mail, voice mail and business attire.

Many employees don't know how to use e-mail appropriately in the workplace. Ramsey says her list for common e-mail mistakes continues to grow.

"Your e-mail is as much a part of your professional image as the clothes you wear, the letters you write, the greeting on your voice mail and the handshake you offer," says Ramsey.

E-mail doesn't have to be the only source of communication â€” it is convenient, but picking up the phone or meeting in person may be more beneficial in certain situations, according to Ramsey. Since employees are more likely to use e-mail when completing workplace tasks, they must realize that etiquette needs to come into play.

Workers must avoid common e-mail mistakes in order to enhance company relationships and maintain professionalism. Ramsey provides some top e-mail errors:

â€” Forgetting to look at spelling and grammar. Make sure to use proper punctuation, grammar and spelling. Think about how the e-mail represents you. What does it say about you as an employee when there are spelling mistakes?

â€” Crafting a long essay. E-mails are meant to be concise so keep the message to a few paragraphs. It should be used for objective material rather than subjective.

â€” Leaving the subject line blank. Write a subject with the e-mail if you want the receiver to read it right away. With the endless amounts of daily e-mail messages, you hope to grab the reader's attention. The subject should refer to the purpose of the message.

â€” Writing in an informal style. Don't forget to include a greeting. You want to personalize the message.

â€” Sending e-mails without thinking about the tone. The receiver can't see your facial expressions, read your body language or hear your tone of voice. Pick your words wisely; you don't want to be misunderstood and end up insulting the reader. If emotional icons are needed, pick up the phone.

â€” Hitting the "reply all" button. Do not forward a message unless you are given permission. Avoid passing on important information that was only meant for your eyes.

â€” Including personal information. Since e-mails can easily be forwarded, think twice before putting confidential elements in a message.

â€” Wanting a quick answer. Other workers may not constantly check their inboxes.

Voice mail is another source of communication with a certain protocol. Callers should be able to easily understand menu options in order to leave a clear message. Ramsey recommends keeping your greeting short and to the point. Try to personalize it and offer another extension that may provide help sooner.

When leaving a voice mail message, make sure to say your name and phone number at the beginning. Don't rush through the number; you want the person to be able to write it down. Remember to mention the reason for the call.

When it comes to proper business attire, workers need a work wardrobe. Weekend or casual clothing won't cut it, according to Ramsey. Employees tend to misinterpret business casual, leading some companies to change the dress code back to business professional. When in doubt, add a jacket as a "finishing touch," says Ramsey.

Consider the industry, your specific position, the region and your clients' expectations when looking for the proper outfit. Your goal is to portray yourself and your company in a positive light.

Rules are in place so workers can build strong relationships and be respectful and kind.

"It isn't about the rules, it is about the relationships," says Ramsey.

For more information on Ramsey and her book, visit www.mannersthatsell.com.

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