

Improving Workplace Etiquette

In today's workplace, office pods, speakerphones and personal devices are just some of the distractions that plague most employees. Use the following tips to make your office a more productive environment for you and your colleagues.

Office Pod Etiquette

- **Speak quietly:** Most office pod walls are relatively low, allowing your voice to carry into neighbouring workspaces. Try to speak in a normal voice at a low volume, and avoid whispering since it can be even more distracting. Avoid using a speakerphone for calls, as the other person's voice will also carry.
- **Respect privacy:** Chances are you'll be able to hear other people's conversations over the walls of your office pod. Even if you have something to bring to the conversation, refrain from interrupting or adding your opinion. If you happen to hear a personal conversation, do not mention the details to anyone, and try to act as if you didn't hear anything.
- **Avoid smells:** Food, perfume and other personal hygiene items should be limited when working in an office pod environment. Smells can travel over walls just as sound can. Certain smells may provoke negative reactions from your colleagues. It is best to use personal products and perfumes sparingly and to eat your lunch or snacks away from your desk.
- **Remain professional:** Do not discuss confidential or private matters in your office pod. If you need to discuss confidential matters, reserve a meeting room or other space with a door to ensure privacy. If you need to make a personal call, take your mobile to a different location where you can speak privately.
- **Turn off your phone.** If you must keep your mobile phone on, set it to vibrate so your colleagues aren't distracted by a noisy ringtone. Make sure you take it with you when you leave your desk in case it rings.
- **Do not interrupt:** If you need to speak to a colleague who is on the phone, never interrupt using questions or gestures, as this is very distracting. Instead, wait until they have finished before approaching them with your question or problem. When approaching a colleague's pod, respect their privacy and personal space. Do not enter without knocking, and do not rearrange items on their desk.

Email Etiquette

- **Do not type in all capitals:** Typing in all capital letters makes it seem as if you are shouting at the recipient.

- **Include a subject:** When emailing, always include a subject line to inform the recipient of the email's contents. However, keep the subject line short and to the point. The bulk of the information should be placed in the body of the email.
- **Delete extra information:** When forwarding or replying to an email, delete unnecessary information such as headers and issues that have already been resolved. Do not make the recipient scroll through pages of information in order to find relevant information. When replying to a question, copy the question text to the beginning of the email.
- **Always reply:** When you receive a question or a request in an email, always make a point of replying to the sender, even if you cannot provide the information immediately. A reply lets the sender know you have received the request and will be providing the information at a later date.
- **Proofread:** Always spell-check your messages before sending, and read them through to ensure you are conveying the message you intend to send. Grammatical and spelling errors in an email can be interpreted by the recipient as laziness and can lead to misunderstandings.

Phone Etiquette

- **Do not eat:** Refrain from eating and drinking while speaking on the phone. These sounds can be distracting to the person on the other end.
- **Leave detailed messages:** When leaving a message, make sure you include enough information for the other party. Clearly state your name, phone number, the purpose of your call and the best time to ring you back. Try to include this information as concisely as possible.
- **Respect time:** When you phone someone, always check if it's a convenient time for the other person to talk. If it is not, ask when you should ring back.

Business Meeting Etiquette

- **Have an agenda:** When you are running the meeting, always have an agenda, and hand it out prior to the meeting. This will give participants time to prepare. During the meeting, stick to the agenda; if new issues arise, arrange another time to discuss them.
- **Ensure you invite the appropriate people:** A meeting is only useful if all of the appropriate people are present. Decisions cannot be made unless everyone who has a stake in the project is involved. Similarly, only invite the required people. Inviting people who do not need to be there shows a lack of respect for their time.
- **Be on time:** Make sure you are always on time for meetings. Meetings that start late often end late, pushing everyone's schedule behind. Arriving late to meetings shows a lack of respect for your colleagues.
- **Keep within the scheduled time:** Do not allow the meeting to run over the allotted time. If you need more time to discuss issues, arrange a follow-up meeting for later in the day or week. Respect participants' time and other projects by sticking to timings.

- **Thank attendees:** Make sure you thank the meeting participants for making time in their schedules for the meeting. This is an easy way to show respect for your colleagues.

Office Party Etiquette

- **Make an effort to go:** Even if the party is not obligatory, it is a good idea to go. Use the party as a way to meet new people. You do not need to be the first to arrive and the last to leave, but putting in an appearance is a good way to get yourself noticed.
- **Limit alcohol intake:** When at an office party, remember that you are among managers and colleagues. Limit your alcohol intake so as not to make a poor impression.
- **Dress appropriately:** Find out beforehand what type of dress is expected. An office party is not the time to make an outrageous fashion statement.
- **Mingle:** Try to mingle with colleagues and managers. Make a point of talking to people you do not work with on a daily basis. Use the time to develop relationships.
- **Include your partner:** If partners are invited to the party, make sure you include them in conversations. Do not talk about work issues since partners will probably not be able to join in the conversation.

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