



Professional Etiquette

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Etiquette plays an important role in the success of a person in the modern work environment. Recent studies show that 85% of a person's success in getting and advancing in a position banks upon people skills, and only 15% on technical knowledge.

*"The gentle mind by gentle deeds is known.
For a man by nothing is so well be-
trayed
As by his manners."*

Edmund Spenser - *Fairie Queene*

Considering the precariousness of global economy and job markets, our youngsters are quite anxious about career prospects, job retention and displacements. Other things being equal, the candidate with the most impressive etiquette is hired first, promoted sooner and enjoys greater security in his position. Recent studies by Harvard University and the Stanford Research Institute indicate that 85% of a person's success in getting and advancing in a position banks upon people skills, and only 15% on technical knowledge.

Etiquette denotes the forms, manners and customs as desirable in social intercourse, in professional conduct, and in of-

ficial interactions. It also encompasses the rules and canons for such forms, manners, and ceremonies. The late-day employees, managers and executives are acutely alert to the centrality of communication and connectivity in the success of their enterprises. Hence it is but natural that they let a lot of store by a worker's adeptness in the finer arts of effective communication and decorous behaviour.

Job-seekers are to be equipped with the necessary skills that would advance their career and further their prospects in the workplace and in the society. There is no gainsaying that good manners, correct behaviour, social graces, civility, propriety and protocol that fall within the ambit of etiquette, are crucial for success in the modern competitive world. Some of the elementary principles of etiquette are briefly listed:

- While interacting, speak in a manner appropriate to the occasion, exuding warmth and civility, without an iota of

domination.

- Wear dress suited to the occasion. "Apparel oft proclaims the man", as Polonius says in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.
- Arrive punctually and never outstay your welcome.
- Adhere to the established rules and norms of the organisation.
- Follow table manners scrupulously. Gluttony is a cardinal sin.

There are scores of occasions where courtesy and decorum are of crucial significance. However, only ten situations are handpicked here.

Workplace Etiquette

Due to the stress and strain of the prevailing business milieu, productivity, meeting deadlines and forging ahead at work, take precedence over finer graces. Common courtesies are often relegated to the background, treating others with courtesy and respect, takes just a few extra moments, but its spiraling positive impact enhances satisfaction and augments effectiveness. Decent dealings go a long way in elevating one's standing and making the grade in a profession. As Lady Mary Montague rightly puts it, "Civility costs nothing, but buys everything". Some of the basic rules are:

- While greeting people, wear a smile and respond to their greetings. Wish them with their name, eg. "Good morning Sir", "Evening Madam".
- Your day-to-day speech should abound in expressions like "Pleas", "Thank you", "Sorry", "May I ...", "How may I help you" etc.
- Be punctual. Arriving late and leaving early are unprofessional.
- Be conscious of your voice level. A gentle modulation is desirable.
- Don't hang about disturbing people at work.
- Using the company phone, messaging or checking e-mail etc. for personal purposes, should be avoided.
- Never butt in a speaker, if interruption is unavoidable, preface it with an "excuse

me". Avoid gossip and obscenity as well.

- Avoid fancy ring tones. Choose a professional and classy tune. Speakephone is to be avoided.
- Be empathetic and tactful. Follow the Biblical aphorism "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."
- Appreciate the slightest courtesies or favours offered to you. As Voltaire says, "By appreciation we make excellence in others our own property."



Cubicle Conventions

In order to make the professional work more effectively in cubicles, a set of protocols has been drawn up.

- Keep your voice low, especially while on the phone. While leaving your desk, ensure that the answering machine is turned on.
- It is improper to interrupt someone on the phone. Approach him or her only after the person is done with it. Signs or whistles to pass messages are in bad taste.
- Respect boundaries. If you want to enter a cubicle, knock gently on the semi-partition. Discussion over the semi walls is to be avoided.
- If a cubicle is shared, take lunch or tea at different times.
- Beware of smell, be it perfume, victrols or body odour.
- Keep the cubicle spick and span.

Corporate Etiquette

The interview over, you are waiting with bated breath for the outcome. You're se-

Emily Post on Etiquette

Emily Post was an American author famous for writing on etiquette. In 1922 her book, *Etiquette in Society, in Business, in Politics, and at Home* (frequently referenced as *Etiquette*) became a bestseller, and updated versions continued to be popular for decades.

Carnegie's Courses

Dale Carnegie, the American writer and lecturer, was famous for his courses in self-improvement, salesmanship, corporate training, public speaking and interpersonal skills. His book *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (1936) is a massive bestseller.



lected to the coveted post! Now is the time to know the details of the organization.

- Follow the dress code of the company. Being a greenhorn, you have to be sure about the practice of wearing a tie, half-sleeve shirts, casual wear, sandals, slip-on shoes etc.
- If you meet anyone, especially a lady or a junior, carrying a load of files, lend a helping hand.
- While entering a lift or exiting, 'ladies first' is the rule, feminine notwithstanding, hold the door open for anyone following you.
- Don't fanatically cling to your mother tongue in the company of non-native speakers of the language.

E-mail Etiquette

Do's

- Plan the e-mail adequately. While mailing someone for the first time, use a few words of introduction.
- Respond to e-mails concisely and promptly.
- Your e-mail should contain a courteous greeting and closing phase. Address your contact with the proper level of formality. Fippancy in address is a common mistake.
- Should the file be large, consult the recipient as to the desirability of sending it.
- Know the difference between British and American English in spelling and grammar.

Don'ts

- Don't type in capitals. It is tantamount to

shouting.

- Don't send or expect office e-mails on holidays or weekends unless the recipient is working on those days.
- Don't send unsuitable attachments nor forward e-mail virus hoaxes or chain letters.
- Don't mark 'urgent' in an e-mail or subject line.
- Don't send professional e-mails from your company e-mail ID, especially when you are angry.

Telephone Etiquette

For a successful telephonic conversation, preparation is essential for both the caller and the receiver.

- Keep the phone directory and the stationery related to the phone, along with the phone, on a separate table.
- Before making the call, note down the points to be discussed.
- Begin the conversation with a wish followed by revealing the identity. Words should be specific, brief and distinctly pronounced.
- Talk politely and gently even if you are the boss. Never scold over the phone.

On the receiving side

- A scribbling pad and a pen should be procured before attending the ringing phone.
- The purpose of the call is to be ascertained when the conversation starts. If the caller is a stranger, seek his contact number and other details.



Positive Thinking

Dr. Norman Vincent Peale was a motivational speaker and author of "The Power of Positive Thinking". He was a progenitor of the theory of "positive thinking."



- Don't repeat 'hello' over the phone. But say 'yes', 'yeah', 'ok', 'then' etc., which shows that you are earnestly listening.
- Listen carefully and respond quickly after the other person stops talking.

Media Etiquette

- Since the media have a substantial role to play on the image of your organization, they are to be treated politely with respect and candour. "Politeness is like an air cushion; there may be nothing in it, but it eases our jolts wonderfully," as Samuel Johnson rightly puts it.
- The message you convey to them should be accurate, brief and positive.
- Don't share with them inside information or off-the-record remarks.
- An establishment need have only one spokesperson.
- Should the media get facts wrong or twist your handouts out of context, keep your cool and ask them politely to rectify.

Manners in Business and Social Settings

Business etiquette is central to one's success in the field, especially against the backdrop of the emphasis laid upon professionalism and relationship building. In social relations it has always been 'ladies first'. For instance, men are expected to hold the door open for women, let them enter a room first, and wait for them to be seated. Friends are introduced to family members, persons in lower echelons to the

higher-ups. But in business situations, men and women are treated on a par with each other and gender discrimination is deemed offensive. A firm handshake is considered as an appropriate form of greeting.

In social set up, men are expected to foot the bill. But in a business situation, it is the host who pays, regardless of gender. If you are using a laptop during a dinner, ensure that your companion also can view it. Canons of table etiquette are also to be scrupulously abided by.

Restaurant Etiquette

Dining etiquette enhances your enjoyment of the fare, for sure.

- If a luxury cuisine in luxurious environs is in your mind, select a swanky and exclusive restaurant in line with your taste and of your guests.
- Speak in a low tone to everyone, including the waiter or the Manager. Don't snap the fingers to call a waiter.
- Bring food to your mouth, not vice versa.
- Avoid slurping or munching.
- Never stretch across for a dish. Suggest it be passed to you.
- Do not talk with your mouth full, nor should you crack jokes while eating.
- Use the napkin occasionally to wipe the tips of your finger or your mouth.
- Once the meal is done, place the fork and knife side by side at the centre of the plate and the napkin, on the left side.
- Don't contemplate the bill or tip. Tackle discrepancy, if any, tactfully.

Interview Etiquette

Do's

- In order to ace the job interview, the candidate should participate in a few mock interviews, videographed, if possible.
- Gather inside information about the company, like its vision and mission, unique strength, important people and the selection process.
- The interview file containing all relevant documents - originals and copies - is to be arranged.

King Arthur's Table

King Arthur's table was round, legend says, to avoid fighting over who should occupy the seats of honour.



- Visualize the interview, especially the questions likely to be asked.
- Make a list of questions you should ask the board, when invited. For example, "What kind of training for personal development is there at the entry level?" "Will freshers be involved in overseas work?" "When will you be making a final decision?"
- Memorize the resume and be ready to answer any question based on it.
- **On the D-day**, reach the venue sufficiently early and relax.
- Ensure that your body language and dress are elegant, mirroring your attitude and personality.
- Greet the board with a smile. Shake hands, if offered. See that your palm is not moist.
- Sit, when asked. Maintain eye contact with the board members.
- Be attentive and answer with precision, coherence and enthusiasm.
- Show utmost courtesy in manners and speech.

Don'ts

- Don't sit frozen like a rabbit in the glare of headlights.
- Don't be tempted to say 'yes/no' only while answering. Substantiate.
- Don't argue or try to change the topic of discussion.
- Don't make slighting references to the organization or people you worked with.

Post-interview Etiquette

After the interview it is prudent that you follow up by mail or over phone. You may also "rewind the tapes" and recollect their

questions and your answers. The follow-up indicates your genuine interest in the job and may tilt the balance in your favour, when short-listed. Begin with a "Thank you". Enquire about the status of the selection process only on completion of the period they may have mentioned during the interview.

Professional Etiquette

Since workplaces and offices are getting more competitive and tense, in order to ensure survival in such an ambience, one has to be diplomatic and well-mannered.

- Be positive and proactive.
- Be punctual for meetings and prepared to contribute.
- Your apparel and speech do proclaim your personality.
- "Speak low if you speak love", says Shakespeare. This applies to every situation. Avoid embarrassing questions as well.
- Keep the cell phone in silent mode or the tone at the bare minimum. You have to be magnanimous and accommodative as well, since as Emerson rightly puts it, "good manners are made up of petty sacrifices."

Conclusion

Seldom did our primitive ancestors bother about good manners or protocol, since their life was a perpetual encounter with the elements. It is no longer nature but nurture that has the strongest influence on a person's development. Nature and the resultant culture impose upon us new value systems and codes of conduct. In such a milieu, observance of good manners is the sine qua non for one's success and progress in life.

The adage "Manners maketh man" (motto of New College, Oxford) has become the mantra of professional etiquette. So, with the celebrated poet Alfred Lord Tennyson let's

"Ring in the nobler modes of life
With sweeter manners, purer laws." ■

R&D Spending

The total research and development (R&D) spending of the top 100 companies in India is ₹ 11,500 crore. Only 12 per cent of it goes into partnership with universities.