

DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, May 7, 2004

Proper business introductions help avoid costly faux pas

Denver Business Journal - by Jacqueline Mansfield

What, exactly, is etiquette?

First, etiquette dictates that I introduce myself: My name is Jacqueline Mansfield and I am an Englishwoman living in Colorado.

You might therefore be forgiven in thinking that my being English automatically makes me more of an expert on this subject than most. If you hear me speak, you might also assume that I am more cultured, intelligent and generally classier than the average person. Of course, you may possibly be right.

Meanwhile, let's look at the Oxford English Dictionary version of the meaning of etiquette: "The rules of correct behavior in society or among the members of a profession."

I think this has a much nicer tone to it than the description found in the American Heritage Dictionary: "The practices and forms prescribed by social convention or by authority."

Either way, the word etiquette originates from the old French word estiquet, meaning "label."

Label is appropriate, as we are instantly labeled, summed-up, generally judged, or worse, written off within the first 30 seconds of meeting another human being.

On the basis that we never get a second chance to make a first impression, it's absolutely crucial, especially in business, that the first impression you make is a positive one.

Let's examine some dreadful mistakes that people make when meeting others for the first time:

- First, there's the handshake: We've all experienced the bone-crushing one that proves your strength and leaves impressions of your ring in the victim's right hand. Then there's the limp, unctuous offering, guaranteed to send an involuntary shudder down the spine of the recipient.

Another ghastly version has the entire arm pumping from the shoulder, potentially spilling drinks, knocking off eyeglasses and leaving the other person wilted.

The correct way to shake hands is simply this: Extend the hand from the elbow, thumb uppermost. Make sure the webbing between your thumb and forefinger contacts that of the other person. Two or three short shakes should follow, with a grip that ought to resemble a well-fitting ski boot. Coloradans know what this means.

- Then there are the eyes. Nothing is more off-putting than someone shaking your hand while simultaneously scanning the room behind you for a better prospect. This is insulting and makes him look like a boor.

Keep your eyes focused on the person you are greeting, smile in a relaxed manner and introduce yourself clearly: For instance, "How do you do, I'm John Wetherby, president of Acme Electronics." Then wait for a response. Once they've given you their name, repeat it with something like, "Delighted to meet you, David."

Now it gets a little more complicated, because there is a correct way to introduce superiors to clients, clients to co-workers, etc. Once you've mastered this, you never will feel uneasy about making introductions in any business setting.

By the way, if you never knew what I'm about to tell you and you never felt uneasy before, then perhaps you should have.

The rules for business introductions are simple, regardless of gender:

1. Always introduce the client first.
2. If it's not a client, always introduce the higher-ranking person first.
3. If they are of equal rank, introduce the one you know least to the one you know better.

Once you've mastered this, there are some serious faux pas that must be avoided:

- Unless you have permission, never use just first names when introducing someone to a superior in your own business, to a business client, to a person of higher rank, to a professional offering their services or to an older person.
- Should you forget someone's name, don't ask them to repeat it more than once during a conversation. I'm sure I don't need to tell you why, but in case I do: You'll seem disinterested and preoccupied.

Use the technique of repeating their name back to them and creating a word association in your head. Example: George (of the jungle, etc.). Should you forget once, be charming, smile, apologize and beg forgiveness. Begging forgiveness always works.

On the other hand, always feel free to ask someone to repeat their name if you didn't quite hear it the first time. Once again, be charming and apologetic, and repeat it back to them, as in "Mrs. Bandaranaike! Thank you."

- Always be prepared to re-introduce yourself graciously when someone you've met several times forgets your name. They'll remember you as someone with exemplary manners, even though they can't remember who you are. They may have a short-term memory problem
- It is unacceptable to grab any other part of a person other than their hand when being introduced. Later on, men might indulge in a little back-slapping once a bond is formed, but forearm grabbing, shoulder patting, hand in the back or holding the hand for more than two seconds or with both hands during a handshake is positively forbidden.
- Once you've successfully introduced people to one another, be sure that all parties are comfortable with the introduction and give them something to talk about before you move on.

Be aware that dropping outrageous and provocative statements about the personal lives of any individual is considered very poor manners. Keep it clean and simple; something like "Henry, you and Susan are both members of the same golf club" will suffice.

Jacqueline Mansfield is the president of Essential Etiquette, a company offering seminars and etiquette training for all levels of business. Reach her at 303-888-7467.

DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, June 4, 2004

Proper table manners will impress business colleagues

Denver Business Journal - by Jacqueline Mansfield Etiquette

How many people out there can honestly say they have irreproachable table manners?

It's a fact: If you eat like a pig, certain business opportunities never will be made available to you. You'll only go so far and, I suspect, only as far as the group through all your other ill-mannered friends eat at.

Someone once said, "When we are born, we are no more than savage little grubs. It is our parent's responsibility to drag us kicking and screaming into civilized adulthood." It's therefore clear table manners are acquired, not hard-wired into our DNA.

Having beautiful table manners will open many doors for you. You'll seem like a true sophisticate and I suspect you'll be invited more often. Bearing in mind you'll be invited to business dinners and lunches whether or not you're a messy eater, I shall now lay out guidelines that must be followed.

These are irrespective of whether you think your business colleagues don't mind that you lick your knife, shovel food in from a height of two inches off your plate and hold your cutlery like farm implements.

- Rule No. 1: Good manners dictate you do nothing that's unpleasant to anyone else.
- It's therefore essential you eat quietly and at a moderate speed. Refrain from speaking with food in your mouth, eating with your mouth open. Keep your elbows off the table and out of your neighbor's ribs. Food goes from fork to mouth, bypassing your clothing, the tablecloth and everyone else.
- When faced with an armory of silverware, start at the outermost and work your way inwards. The place setting is laid out in the same order the food is served.

How you hold your cutlery will immediately categorize you. Did you grow up on a farm and eat with the cattle? The rainforests of Borneo?

There is only one correct way to hold a knife and fork and it goes as follows:

- Keeping the forefingers above the tines of the fork and the blade of the knife, the ends of both handles should rest in the center of the palm of the hand. The fork is turned tines-down as you use the knife to cut only one or two small pieces at a time. A rapid sawing motion through the entire dish before dropping your knife with a clang is unacceptable.
- Once you've cut a couple of pieces, gently place the knife along the right uppermost part of the plate. Transfer your fork to the right hand and spear small amounts of food.

The purpose of this is twofold: Should you stuff large amounts, you'll not only resemble a squirrel preparing for hibernation but you'll also be tempted to speak with food in your mouth. It's a business dinner and conversation will be lively. "Spray that again?" is a question no well-mannered person wants to hear.

Moving on -- there's more to a table setting than the eating tools.

- Keep your hands off all glassware or crystal to your left. They aren't yours. Yours are to the right of your place setting. Likewise, any bread on a plate or tablecloth to your right isn't yours either. Yours is on the left.
- As for your napkin, unless you're dining at a seafood shack, never tuck it under your chin. Always drape it, partly unfolded (dinner) or fully unfolded (lunch) on your lap. It's not there to catch the food you carelessly dropped as you made the mistake of illustrating a point to your fellow diners by waving your food-laden fork in the air. Nor is it ever to be used for blowing your nose. It's for the occasional wiping of the mouth only.

Should you need to leave the table before the end of the meal, simply place it on your chair. This tells the waiter you're returning. At the end of the meal, fold it casually and place to the left of your plate.

If in any doubt, follow the host's lead -- unless, of course, they have atrocious manners themselves. You may then proceed to set a fine example without showing off.

Your choice of food and drink also will label you. This isn't the place to experiment with something you don't know how to eat properly.

- Avoid food with a high splash-factor, such as long pasta, clams, etc. Sip soup silently from the side of the spoon. Tip the bowl away from you to get the last drops.
- Resist ordering the cocktail you discovered in Cozumel. No umbrellas, bananas or blue drinks. Acceptable drinks are vodka or gin and tonic, straight scotch, bourbon and wine. Club soda is always OK.
- Never, ever get drunk.

As for your fellow diners, the rules again are simple but set in stone:

- Whoever invited everyone to a business dinner or lunch pays the bill.
- In all circumstances, when a lady arrives or departs from the table, gentlemen stand up. Help her with her chair if possible.
- Unless the host insists, don't order the most expensive item on the menu.
- If you're asked to select the wine and you're flummoxed, ask for the wine waiter's recommendation.

While these tidbits of dining etiquette merely scratch the surface of this complex subject, you'll seem like a dining savant if you follow them.

Jacqueline Mansfield is the president of Essential Etiquette, a company offering seminars and etiquette training for all levels of business. Reach her at 303-888-7467.

DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, July 2, 2004

Dress properly, before casual Fridays ruin workplace

Denver Business Journal - by Jacqueline Mansfield

I was recently asked to address the inappropriateness of business attire. Personally, I believe business dress should be, er, businesslike, so here goes:

The "casual Fridays" theme was the thin end of the wedge. Now we have casual Mondays through Fridays in many places. I've seen people enthusiastically anticipating the weekend sporting shorts, baseball caps, sneakers, beachwear and T-shirts bearing political or subversive statements.

This is unbusinesslike. What if an important client dropped in to your office unannounced, only to fear they've stumbled into an anarchic Jimmy Buffet look-alike contest?

Despite the summer heat, it's inappropriate to flash flesh freely in the workplace. This is distracting to your colleagues and may get you into hot water. You are there to work, after all.

Obviously, company cultures vary and one needs to fit in rather than stand out like a sore thumb. A fail-safe measure is to dress at the same level of formality as your immediate superior. If you're the uppermost superior, then you are setting the standard.

Interestingly, the United States is more formal in certain instances than Europe. For example, in the U.S. workplace, ladies wear stockings even when it's 100 degrees outside. (Thankfully, these can be totally sheer and some will actually stay up by themselves.) I suspect air conditioning is the culprit. Europeans are a steamier lot.

A piece of advice I was given years ago by an elegant sophisticate was this: "Whatever else you wear, at least be sure you wear the very best quality shoes money can buy, because those 'in the know' will categorize you by your footwear." I agree. Nothing is more ruinous to an otherwise presentable appearance than scruffy, cheap-looking shoes. From the toes up, here are some guidelines that will help you cultivate a truly professional appearance:

- For gentlemen -- Good-quality, well-cared-for leather shoes in black or brown with neutral-colored socks and matching belt are a must in a professional business environment. White, pastel or socks with flying pigs are out.
- For ladies -- Classic leather shoes with no more than a 3-inch heel (sling backs are fine), worn with skin tone or sheer dark stockings. Apparently, it's acceptable in many professional environments to see your toes on Fridays. Be sure your pedicure is immaculate; otherwise, cover up your toes.

Either way, your shoes should be the best quality you can afford, but do keep them respectable. Style "Moulin Rouge" isn't appropriate. Your handbag doesn't need to match, but save the frou-frou piece for evenings and weekends.

- Moving up, a two- or three-piece, dark-colored or black business suit for men, single- or double-breasted, two- or three-buttoned, with or without pinstripes, is a must. Wool blend for winter, linen blend or light gabardine weight for summer. Worn with a white (powerful-looking) or pale-colored oxford or button-down shirt and understated but

tasteful tie.

Note: This isn't the place to wear that fun tie that resembles a trout or worse, lights up and tinkles "Dixie."

- Ladies -- A two-piece pant or skirt suit in similar fabric weights as before. Be sure the skirt is no more than 3 inches above your knees, worn with a light-colored blouse that is neither sheer nor plunging.
- Sports jackets are fine -- Lighter weights/colors in the summer, of course, worn with neutral-colored slacks. The same goes for the ladies, who enjoy the added advantage of being able to wear a skirt.

Far be it for me to promote the preppy look, but the idea is to wear your clothes rather than the other way round, so polo-style shirts or lightweight sweaters in a cashmere blend, if you can afford it, are just the ticket when the environment is more casual. By the way, cashmere is as cool in summer as it is warm in winter.

Silk T-shirts are comfortable and look good.

Here's the key: When you know you look good, you radiate confidence. Shouldn't you aim for this result every day?

- Jewelry is a tricky subject. It's generally accepted that ladies look good with at most two piercings per ear. It's distracting and inappropriate to sport a row of things following the line of your outer ear, thus resembling a SETI receiver. (Any other piercings you might have are strictly your own business and should remain private.)

Delicate neck chains, pearls (which always flatter, fake or not) and discreet jacket pins are fine for ladies. Heavy gold chains around a gentleman's neck look dreadful.

Obviously, it's acceptable to wear wedding bands and a college ring on the other ring finger. Ladies, resist wearing your entire ring collection at one time and stick to the one-ring-per-hand rule. No thumb rings.

- Regarding tattoos: So many of us have one these days, but they should stay secret. If you're considering a tattoo, for heaven's sake be careful where you put it; you'll seriously jeopardize your progress if you display this ancient art on your face, hands or any other place that cannot be concealed at work.
- As for makeup, to wear none (ladies) seems to arouse suspicion; to wear too much seems to arouse suspicion. Wear it, but discreetly.

Finally, go easy on the cologne. You don't want to suffocate your colleagues. You may not be able to smell it, but rest assured, they will.

Jacqueline Mansfield is the president of Essential Etiquette, a company offering seminars and etiquette training for all levels of business. Reach her at essetiquette@aol.com or 303-888-7467.

DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, August 6, 2004

Do these bad telephone manners ring a bell with you?

Denver Business Journal ~ by Jacqueline Mansfield

Judging by the numerous requests I've handled concerning this subject, I sense that desperation might drive some people to revert to smoke signals as an alternative -- a bad idea during the dry summer months.

The items up for discussion are the land line and the cell phone.

Does your home phone have an idiotic voice-mail message such as: "Yo! This is Brad. You know what to do"? Worse still, did you have your adorable 3-year-old record it with cute-puppy background noises?

A staggering number of people lose potential business opportunities because they recorded a "fun" message on their home voice mail.

Cell phone voice messages are also frequently absurd. This is very unprofessional, resulting in you not being taken seriously, and is fine only if you want to spend your entire life on a surfboard.

Another question: Have you ever been put on hold for an unreasonable amount of time? Anything over 10 seconds is deemed unreasonable to a normal, busy, working person. It's infuriating, not to mention costly, if you're using your cell phone, forcing you to pay to listen to someone else's static.

And then there's the non-reply. How many of us have made several calls to one person because they didn't have the manners to at least respond with a "I'll get back to you"?

These issues contribute to damaging client/business relations.

We've all experienced the public nuisance while shopping for produce, waiting at the doctor's office, using a public restroom, or being imprisoned during a 12-minute ski gondola ride with a self-ab-sorbed loudmouth who feels entitled to talk business on their cell phone while the rest of us shrivel in silence at their insensitivity.

When the cell phone was created, it didn't come with instructions for polite use. And the days when a friendly, well-mannered lady connected you to the person you were calling are gone.

Here are some guidelines that will ensure that you're representing your company and yourself properly, whichever phone you use:

- Create a clear, concise, friendly yet businesslike voice-mail message for yourself on all your phones. If working from home, teach your children to answer the telephone politely or invest in a dedicated business line.
- If you have call waiting and an important call comes through, apologize to the first caller and offer to call them back. Better yet, warn them this might happen. Never put someone on hold for more than the time it takes to establish who's calling. How would you like to have your valuable time wasted?
- Empty your voice mailbox regularly. Nothing is more exasperating than hearing someone's mailbox is full when you

need to notify them their spouse has just been apprehended by the IRS.

- Return calls promptly. Don't be chicken. Tell the truth if you don't have the information, the answer or interest in a vendor's product. It's the decent thing to do.
- Be polite even if the other person isn't. Let them sit with their obnoxiousness while you exemplify decorum.
- Keep your cell phone on vibrate mode in public. The public doesn't want to hear it. Avoid silly-sounding ring tones if you're over 14.

If you take a call in public, please keep the conversation low and out of earshot. Nobody wants to hear you tell your friend what a cow your supervisor is. Move 10 feet away.

- Turn off your cell phone during meetings unless you've given prior notice that you're expecting an important call and then discreetly excuse yourself to take it; likewise during a business lunch or dinner. Some finer restaurants will confiscate them anyway and alert you about incoming calls.
- If you're in public with an earpiece/hands-free set, for heaven's sake, refrain from making wild gesticulations and shouting. You'll seem mad.
- Tell callers you're on your cell phone. When they're disconnected, they'll empathize.
- Never put someone on hold only to forget them when you didn't find the person they were calling for. This could be disastrous to you personally (it might be your CEO) and equally disastrous to a strained client relationship.
- If the caller wants you to take a message instead of leaving a voice mail, do so graciously and remember to pass it on. Resist arguing about it. It might be your biggest potential client; it might be your CEO again, testing your telephone etiquette.
- Lengthy personal calls in the workplace are inappropriate. Use your lunch break. Don't be tempted to call your friends overseas because you think you're entitled. There are ways of tracking your immoral extravagance.

I know of someone who ran up a \$20,000 phone bill by regularly calling Australia because they thought no one would find out. They're still paying for it.

- If you own a camera cell phone, please respect others' privacy. Sending a picture of someone while they're performing a bodily function is unforgivable.
- Finally, don't use your cell phone where members of the public are captive in a confined space, e.g. washroom. You already have it on vibrate mode, don't you? So wait until you're the recommended 10 feet away from others before handling that call.

If business owners trained their employees in telephone etiquette, they'd enhance client and colleague relations as well as their professional reputations.

Failure to use proper etiquette once might be deemed an oversight; more than once is deemed a flaw.

Jacqueline Mansfield is the president of Essential Etiquette, a company offering seminars and etiquette training for all levels of business. Reach her at essetiquette@aol.com or 303-888-7467.

DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, September 3, 2004

Office boors, slobs, extortionists need lesson in manners

Denver Business Journal - by Jacqueline Mansfield

The business-etiquette issues arising in the workplace that I've been asked to resolve are so diverse that it makes sense to tackle them individually in a Q&A format. This way, frustrated business owners, HR directors and rattled employees won't have to wait another couple of months for me to address their particular concerns.

Given that etiquette refers to the correct behavior between members of a profession and people in society, I'll address the perpetrators directly regarding these faux pas, which seem to be universal or are at least spreading like the West Nile virus.

This segues nicely into the justifiable complaint that I heard last week:

Q: What do I do about someone who comes to the office with a bad cold and infects everyone by coughing all over them for a few days before taking time off sick?

A: If this is you and you think you're being heroic by coming to work when you're sick, you're wrong. What you're doing is irresponsible, selfish and unpleasant for others.

The rules are simple: If you're sick with something that can be passed on to other humans, stay away from them! It's the polite thing to do. Your colleagues will thank you, and you can work in the comfort of your own home, if appropriate. That way you won't acquire the tag of "Typhoid Mary."

On the other hand, if you stubbed your toe playing volleyball and you're limping, go to work. It will take your mind off it.

Q: How do we handle a pushy person at work who intimidates us into buying frozen bread dough or sponsoring their kid's pet hamster race at school, organizes collections for every event ranging from baby showers to birthdays and manipulates us into coughing up funds toward events for people we hardly know? We're all in fear of this person and dread the sight of their face peering around the office partition, rattling a money box.

A: You probably see yourself as a great social organizer, don't you? Does the word "extortion" ring any bells?

I recommend the following: Notify everyone in the office that from now on, all collections will occur on a voluntary basis and that you'll post a notice inviting contributions. There's nothing wrong with sending out an intranet e-mail informing everyone of this.

Quite frankly, new people and junior staff in particular can't afford it, nor do they want to part with hard-earned cash for something they don't know or care about. The rest of us would like freedom of choice anyway, so if you are a perpetrator, please show sensitivity to your colleagues and don't lay a guilt trip on them, as this is bad manners.

Q: What can we do about those individuals who never clean up after themselves and leave all their dirty coffee mugs and stuff in the sink for someone else to deal with? They also microwave strong-smelling food that stinks up the office.

A: You know who you are and your parents should have trained you to clear up after yourself before you were 7.

However, once you reached adulthood, you became responsible for your own behavior -- which in this case, shows a total lack of consideration for others.

If you've repeatedly ignored the sign above the sink requesting that you "Please clean up your dishes" and being asked nicely has washed over you, don't be surprised to find your dirty cups, etc. arranged nicely on your desk accompanied by a note, signed by disgusted co-workers, that reads, "We think you forgot something."

As for cooking odiferous foods: This will negatively affect clients and visitors to your office. Once HR hears of this, you'll be held responsible for offending that important client who was revolted by the smell of boiled kippers. This could be costly to you as well as your company.

Q: There's someone at the office who comes to my desk uninvited at least once a day, saying "Got a minute?" -- then yaks for 15 minutes or more, interrupting my work. I've tried saying how busy I am, and I've tried smiling politely and carrying on with my work, but they just keep talking about nonwork-related issues and won't leave. What should I do?

A: Is this creature you? As the "Lesser Spotted Uninvited Gab-mouth," you're not uncommon, particularly as your preferred habitat is the open-plan office because a closed door serves as a deterrent. You'll also recognize yourself as a thick-skinned rhino hide if you frequently hear the words "No, I don't have a minute," but ignore them anyway.

To save yourself from humiliation, be prepared to be taken to lunch and then to be told that your constant gossiping is causing people to make mistakes and miss deadlines. Here's where you can demonstrate good manners by apologizing and keeping your chitchat to a few minutes each day before and after working hours.

These are just some examples of people's inappropriate behavior in the workplace. If businesses had the courage to establish proper codes of behavior, the working environment would be much improved, resulting in enhanced client relations, increased productivity and happier colleagues.

Failure to use proper etiquette once might be deemed an oversight; more than once is deemed a flaw.

Please continue to send your questions and comments to me at Essetiquette@aol.com.

Jacqueline Mansfield is the president of Essential Etiquette, a company offering seminars and etiquette training for all levels of business. Reach her at essetiquette@aol.com or 303-888-7467.

DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, October 1, 2004

How to delete your bad habits when sending e-mails

Denver Business Journal - by Jacqueline Mansfield

What some people fail to realize is that when using e-mail, the computer becomes an extension of themselves. Unchecked opinions and raw emotions are blasted into the universe.

Consequently, there are many things that can go awry, ranging from simply irritating to confusing to irretrievably devastating.

Polite individuals work hard at keeping their negativity under control because good manners dictate they are considerate of other's feelings. This should apply to using e-mail at all times, and proper form needs to be applied.

Someone asked me for help recently because they were concerned about the criticism they received at work due to their allegedly lousy e-mailing technique. No one had been specific in their criticism, however.

If you must criticize, at least have something constructive to say. On that basis, I'm offering guidelines for proper e-mail use, addressing many of the problems that arise.

- Always bear in mind that once sent, an e-mail never can be intercepted, rerouted or canceled. Now it exists potentially for the entire world to see. I know I'm stating the obvious, but if we remember this, we might handle it with more respect.

How many of you have mistakenly sent an e-mail containing personal information to the wrong recipient? I have. It's totally mortifying. Now I'm sure most of Europe knows what I thought of a former colleague. To those of you who have this information, I'm grateful to be living in the United States.

- A foolproof way of avoiding this trauma when forwarding information is to highlight only the text to be forwarded, copy (control C) and paste (control V) the highlighted text into a new e-mail message. Type in the names of the recipient(s) and add your message.

If you highlight the piece you want to send and just hit "forward," the recipient will get everything from the very first message sent out, which could be embarrassing if you were gossiping. If this is too technical for you to grasp, get help.

- The main advantage of e-mail -- its immediateness -- is also a potential hazard. Isn't it incredible how we communicate back and forth instantaneously (unless you're still using dial-up), exchanging ideas and information, generating rapid results?

On the other hand, herein lurks the danger: It's so easy to shoot off a message bearing incorrect information, criticism or strong opinion that it may result in what's known as "flaming." Flaming is when a cycle of send/response spirals out of control. This causes tempers to flare and misunderstandings to arise, because once good manners fall by the wayside, it's tempting to say in an e-mail what you lack the giblets to say face to face or via telephone.

- The solution: In business, should you need to opine, criticize or send vital information, construct the e-mail and ponder it prior to sending, thus giving you time to review what you wrote. Send it when you're confident it addresses only the pertinent issues. To halt a nasty send/response cycle, pick up the telephone and nip it in the bud. If you called someone an idiot or worse in your e-mail, apologize.
- Regarding the overall appearance of your e-mails, keep them tidy and concise. Nobody wants to have to scroll through all the previous e-mailers' details to get to your contribution at the bottom. Delete all unnecessary stuff before forwarding it on.

Always put a heading in the subject line and then stick to the subject. Rambling, chatty e-mails are best kept separate because the e-mail may get forwarded. Don't type in caps; it will look like you're YELLING! Avoid using "emoticons" (smiley faces, etc.) in business e-mails. Keep them for your buddies.

- Always use spellcheck. You don't want to seem an uneducated clod just because you can't type. You certainly wouldn't send a business letter via snail-mail containing spelling and grammatical errors, would you?

Avoid pert little "Hi's as an opener; address the recipient by name. You're e-mailing a person, not a computer. Sign your name at the bottom with your title and contact information, keeping it professional and business-like.

- If someone e-mails you with a specific question/comment, highlight their content and copy/paste it with your answer. You're not the only person they're e-mailing. They've probably already sent 75 that morning.

Receiving a simple "No" from you in a message box is abrupt and time-wasting, as they'll have to retrieve their original e-mail to you to see what you're referring to. Too technical? Get help.

- If you receive an e-mail in error, don't forward it to your entire address book with a mischievous gloat. This is impolite. Forward it to the rightful recipient with a brief explanation. If you're the sender, double-check the recipient's address, especially when sending sensitive subject matter.
- Never pass out e-mail addresses without that person's prior permission. How would you like a ton of unsolicited junk clogging up your mailbox because your thoughtless friend gave your address to a spam factory?
- Avoid acronyms. They can be confusing, IMHO. (See what I mean?)
- If you're fortunate enough to own a Blackberry, resist furtive e-mailing during meetings and business lunches.

Business owners need to train their employees in e-mail etiquette if they want their company to be represented appropriately.

"Failure to use proper etiquette once may be deemed an oversight; more than once is deemed a flaw!"

Jacqueline Mansfield is the president of Essential Etiquette, a company offering seminars and etiquette training for all levels of business. Reach her at essetiquette@aol.com or 303-888-7467.

DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, November 5, 2004

Business travel carries its own set of behavior rules

Denver Business Journal - by Jacqueline Mansfield

Most of us have travel associated with our job. Perhaps you drive, cycle, take light rail, bus or walk to your place of work. You've probably experienced the lack of manners displayed by many commuters at some time.

Business travel etiquette is a huge subject, including:

- (1) When is it appropriate to open your car window to spew a torrent of invective at the driver of the car in front who just cut in? (answer: never).
- (2) Is it polite to offer your seat to the pregnant woman swaying above you? (answer: always).

I now shall address the ugliest manifestations of poor commuting manners:

- As mentioned previously, refrain from using your cell phone where others are captive and you can't move 10 feet away to take the call. This means that on the train, bus, subway or plane, keep your cell phone on vibrate and don't add to the existing decibels by squawking into it. If you absolutely must take or make a call, cover your mouth with your hand, keeping your voice low.
- Be aware you're not the only person running late, who hates their job, or feels exhausted and irritable on the train, bus, plane, etc. Show consideration and don't shove people out of your way. Say "excuse me" and apologize if you inadvertently trample on someone.
- Where possible, respect that people have a sacred space of 18 inches around themselves. If the rush-hour crush forces you to invade this boundary, do so apologetically and graciously.

This isn't the time to surreptitiously feel whether your fellow traveler's jacket is leather or vinyl, unless you want a fractured instep. If you suspect someone of touching you inappropriately, simply look them in the eye and firmly say "Excuse me?"

- Don't be a road hog.

A friend recently experienced a humiliating day at Traffic School. Apparently, the stages of road rage start with "The Unfriendly Zone," which translates into having evil thoughts and not allowing cars to pass, etc., to the "You're Dead Meat Zone," which means you attempted to kill someone with your vehicle, a jack, gun or anything that was handy.

For heaven's sake, your vehicle is a potentially deadly weapon and should be driven with care and consideration for other road users.

Use turn signals before maneuvering. Just because you're late for a meeting and need to pass someone doesn't justify rudely driving within six inches of their rear.

If you're under 30, don't be fooled into believing you're immortal. Older drivers are usually more cautious because they know they aren't.

Use an earpiece for your cell phone while driving. In many countries, it's illegal to use a cell phone while driving.

Avoid the passive-aggressive habit of observing exactly the speed limit in the fast lane.

When you see other drivers committing any of these faux pas, steer clear of them and don't be tempted to mouth obscenities, eyeball them or give them the finger. These are all bad manners. Anyway, it might be your client.

- As for the long-haul business traveler, everyone knows how frustrating airport and hotel check-ins can be. However, unless you're booked into Moose Spit, Alberta, the chances are many people are on vacation and they have every right to enjoy themselves without some rude businessperson expressing impatience at their holiday pace. Remember, you're representing your company.
- When it comes to flying, there are many opportunities to behave badly, and some people heartily embrace them all. Well-mannered travelers however, help one another with heavy overhead luggage, avoiding crushing someone's jacket by laying it neatly to one side.

They allow fellow passengers out of their seat to visit the restroom without expressing annoyance and ask the person behind if it's OK to recline their seat rather than doing so with a jolt.

- It's totally inappropriate to get drunk while traveling, even if you're in the air for 23 hours, destination Sydney. No wonder Qantas flight attendants refer to passengers as "pigs in space" - and that's in first class.

Using the lack of space in "zoo" class as an excuse for elbowing people, coughing all over them and talking excessively when they've made it clear that they'd rather read or sleep is, of course, unacceptable.

The most important thing to remember is that you're not the most important thing. Be courteous. Some great business connections are made en route between well-mannered, sophisticated travelers.

Jacqueline Mansfield is the president of Essential Etiquette, a company offering seminars and etiquette training for all levels of business. Reach her at essetiquette@aol.com or 303-888-7467.

All contents of this site © American City Business Journals Inc. All rights reserved.

DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, January 7, 2005

Being a highly placed executive is no excuse for bad manners

Denver Business Journal - by Jacqueline Mansfield

By applying good manners in business, your ascent up the corporate ladder should be smooth, with few personal conflicts. However, it amazes me that some senior managers, corporate officers, even company presidents, have attained such heights without even a nod to etiquette.

If that's you up there, please let go of the misconception that the rules of etiquette don't apply to you. Remember your employees are guided by your example, which ultimately will affect your clients. It's also a long way down -- and you may hear more sniggers than sympathy en route.

In our PC world, those days are long gone when the new recruit had no option but to resign in disgust because the vice president of sales put a hand on her thigh, asking if it was "OK to rest it there a while?" I only lasted a couple of days in that job; nowadays I'd call my lawyer.

Here are some guidelines for those who think you're above it all:

- Just because you're a vice president, CEO or president, it doesn't entitle you to keep an interviewee waiting for more than 90 minutes, only to then invite them into your office to watch while you stuff your face with an oversized sandwich. Offering them a bite doesn't help.

Have the decency to reschedule, or buy them lunch at least. If they failed the interview, ensure they are notified promptly.

- If you made it to CEO level and expect good working relationships with your executive assistant and other colleagues, please look at them when addressing him/her. Allow yourself to display some semblance of human warmth occasionally -- another effective ploy.

You really don't qualify to hold such an exalted position if you lack basic interpersonal skills. But assuming you somehow made it without them, you'll notice a great improvement in the overall morale and productivity at work if you remember your employees also have feelings.

- Learn everyone's name when they join your company or, at least, where you actually work. There's always time to address someone by name and inquire as to their well-being. Demonstrate a modicum of respectful interest in your employees' lives.
- If you require your staff to dress a certain way, then lead from the front and dress that way yourself. If it's OK for you to bring your dog to the office, then surely everyone may? Be fair-minded, not dictatorial.
- Take responsibility for your mistakes and apologize if appropriate.
- If you invite others to business lunches and dinners, you pay.
- Congratulate people on a job well done, however small. The boost to their self-esteem will have an instantaneous

and positive effect on their work.

- If you need to fire someone, do it yourself rather than relinquishing responsibility and scuttling spinelessly out of the office for a "meeting" until the deed is done.
- Avoid treating employees as Kleenex. Yes, there are plenty of people out there looking for work, but high staff turnover is costly to any organization. It's also demoralizing to those stalwarts who've tolerated you from the outset.
- Be careful to whom you refer people in business, as this reflects upon you.

Someone I know was referred to a senior executive at a large New York company by a powerful New York agent. The senior executive called the referred one, oozing saccharine obsequiousness, promising to give their proposal priority.

After three months, the referred one, having heard nothing, decided to call the same senior executive, only to be abruptly informed -- "I'm too busy, go elsewhere."

Undeterred, the referred one resubmitted with a polite note, copying the agent and thanking them for their time. Another two months passed before a brief, undated note arrived, typed on plain paper and written by a complete stranger. This was completely unprofessional, a poor reflection on the company and embarrassing for the agent, who was mortified when informed.

If you recognize yourself or your company here, be aware the agent probably will think twice before referring anyone to you again.

Finally, if you're further down the corporate ladder and are witnessing bad manners above you, don't be deterred and certainly don't follow their example; they've probably gone as far as they ever will, whereas you can show you're a person of integrity, good character and, of course, exemplary manners.

One day you could be looking over your shoulder at individuals who today may be looking down on you.

Jacqueline Mansfield is president of Essential Etiquette, a company offering personal coaching and etiquette training for all levels of business. Reach her at EssEtiquette@aol.com or 303-888-7467.

All contents of this site © American City Business Journals Inc. All rights reserved.

DENVER
BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, February 4, 2005

New on the job? How to make powerful first impressions

Denver Business Journal - by Jacqueline Mansfield

It's imperative that when you start a new job, you put your best foot forward from the outset. Remembering that the first impression you give is the one everyone will recall whatever you do thereafter should keep you on your toes.

For instance, if the first time the CEO sees you is at the precise moment you're adjusting yourself or your underwear, you'll always be remembered as "the one with ill-fitting underwear or an intimate problem." This could damage your credibility when you need to be taken seriously because that image forever will be burned in his/her mind's eye.

However intimidated you may feel on day one, never let others sense this. Everyone has been in the same boat at some time. Because failure to use proper etiquette once may be deemed an oversight but more than once is deemed a flaw, here are guidelines to ensure your absorption into this new culture is as smooth as possible.

After all, the impression you want to create from the onset is that you're a real asset:

- Be on time. Establish how long it takes to get there by making a rush-hour trial run. Aim to be slightly early each morning -- you'll find plenty of others with the same approach and with whom you can chat, show an interest in and bond with, all without interrupting anyone's work.
- In the beginning, it's a good idea to make notes of people's names, interests and position within the company until you familiarize yourself. Ask the human resources department for a list of co-workers' names, roles, extension numbers and where they sit. Get a map. This will save you time early on, unless, of course, there are only three of you working there.
- Notice how your immediate superior dresses and stick to that level of formality. If you were interviewed on "casual Friday," be sure to ask about the company dress code and/or drop in on another day to check out co-workers' attire.
- Establish how people prefer to be addressed. Ingratiate yourself (without overdoing it) with a sympathetic person who seems the most likely to take you under their wing, if you aren't offered someone specifically for that purpose. Someone who smiles a lot is a good bet. Buy them lunch to thank them.
- Smile a lot in a relaxed and friendly manner, rather than sporting a toothsome grimace beneath panic-filled eyes.
- During the first few days, try to introduce yourself to all your colleagues. Let them know how thrilled you are to be working with/for them. Shake hands properly with them all, even the janitor. You want your trash emptied regularly, don't you? The janitor might have been there 40 years and may be the chairman's confidante, so treat everyone courteously.
- However overwhelmed you feel by the unfamiliar workload, don't whine. Take a deep breath, smile and stay calm. You'll absorb everything more quickly if you resist giving in to despair.
- Be charming and apologetic if you repeatedly need to solicit help. Make a self-deprecating joke. People warm to that. Nevertheless, be sensitive to the fact they have work to do.

- Don't be too open about your private life, however genuinely curious others seem. It's not their business that during weekends, you do karaoke dressed as Luke Skywalker. Keep it safe and respectable.
- If you have a wicked sense of humor, resist trying it out on day one. See how the land lies before revealing yourself as a prankster.
- Keep your cell phone on vibrate and your personal calls to a minimum.
- Use cologne sparingly.
- Join co-workers for lunch, when appropriate, to familiarize yourself with the culture.

You'll initially hear a lot of gossip posing as useful information. This will tell you more about the gossiper than the subject matter, so by all means listen to what's said but resist joining in.

- Be cooperative. Asking someone if they need help with something doesn't necessarily interfere with your job and anyway, good teamwork means Together, Everyone Achieves More.
- If there's a regular Friday night gathering at a local bar, join in occasionally but keep your alcohol intake to a minimum.
- If possible, have a conversation with your predecessor about the idiosyncrasies of your immediate superior(s) and/or co-workers. This may be tainted with subjective opinion but can be useful, such as your boss adores anchovies on everything. Pray this person isn't mischievous.
- Learn about the company before you start. Public companies' annual reports are a matter of public record. Many organizations have a Web site, and reviewing it will give you an advantage and your superiors will notice you've done your homework, thus enhancing the great first impression you're generating.
- Finally, if you're entering upper management, you ought to be familiar with all of the above -- or are you? If so, consider this a refresher course. The goal is for them to want to keep you around until you're ready to move on -- and not before.

Jacqueline Mansfield is president of Essential Etiquette, a company offering personal coaching and etiquette training for all levels of business. Reach her at EssEtiquette@aol.com or 303-888-7467.

All contents of this site © American City Business Journals Inc. All rights reserved.

DENVER
BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, March 4, 2005

If you're first person they see, make positive impression

Denver Business Journal - by Jacqueline Mansfield

First impressions are the one-time-only opportunity to present yourself and your company in the most positive light.

All businesses have one person with whom the outside world first comes into contact, be it face to face or via telephone. Whether you're a CEO or busboy, or work in an office, department store or restaurant, etc., how you first interact with the public will taint or enhance that person's experience and determine their opinion of you and your company.

This works both ways because as a customer or client, you are equally expected to demonstrate good etiquette. Just because you may be parting with some money doesn't justify you parting with your manners.

Starting with the service industry: The word "service" means just that. You're being paid to offer good service to the customer.

In today's highly competitive marketplace, this means more than giving correct change. Giving good service means that even if you had a row with your spouse or have a terrible hangover, you keep all evidence of these inconveniences hidden, because, frankly, no one cares.

It's proof of your true professionalism if, despite your crumbling private world, you consistently smile in a friendly manner (while on the telephone, too), give at least three seconds of eye contact to the person you're dealing with face to face and thank them for their business, even if the customer is an ill-mannered ignoramus and you work in the lowliest setting on Earth (in your opinion).

If you're a telephone order-taker, whatever your company policy, I suggest that before subjecting the buyer to your rapid-fire pitch ensnaring them into a subscription for three years' supply of unwanted magazines, please ask first if they'd mind. I certainly mind when all I want to buy is lingerie.

The practice of bait and switch is dishonest, infuriating and will lose potential regular customers. Do you really want to mollify the angry customer who drove 40 miles to buy something that you either don't have or are selling at a higher price than advertised? That's totally inconsiderate and means "bad-mannered" in my book. Get up to date on special offers as well, because your ignorance is equally infuriating.

Be genuine: At a supermarket recently, the checkout person addressed me in an affected and unctuous voice, calling me "Madam" every few seconds. I didn't know whether to laugh or run. Interestingly enough, when this person addressed a co-worker, their tone was normal. I'll make a point of avoiding that checkout lane even if it means a longer wait. That's how off-putting it was. Such extremes are unnecessary and make one seem foolish.

A wise soul once told me even if your job is janitor of a public toilet, performing your task with dignity and perfectionism means you're a classy person. I agree. Keep the voice natural, though.

Those of you demanding great service everywhere you go also need to step up to the plate. Everyone with whom you come into contact is deserving of courtesy. Three seconds of eye contact is required from you, too. "Please" and "thank you" always should be part of your vocabulary.

Refrain from using your cell phone when someone is facilitating a transaction for you.

Those with an innate sense of class and etiquette treat everyone with consideration, so talking down to someone who's serving you is a dead giveaway you're totally lacking in breeding and manners.

If you are the "VP of First Impressions," which is my euphemism for those who are receptionists, front-of-house or front-desk associates, then you must live up to this title.

Being burdened by an overwhelming amount of administrative work is no excuse for sloppy, frosty client/public greetings, curt telephone manner or sporting the air of someone being inconvenienced.

The best receptionist I ever met was sole admin support to marketing, human resources and numerous levels of management in a hectic office. She never allowed the stress of her job or private life to interfere with her professionalism. Consistently smartly dressed, she fostered good client relationships, always smiled and made everyone feel welcome, despite her huge workload.

Conversely, it's a poor representation of any company to be met with disinterest and a stony glare, especially when that person has plenty of smiles for co-workers.

Appearances are also crucial. It's disconcerting to enter an elegant office reception area only to be greeted by a biker chick lookalike. I hope they're reading this.

Finally, whatever awaits you as you enter any work environment, always be polite. Build a relationship with the front office, as it will serve you well in business. Get on first-name terms with them if possible. Be friendly, and even if no etiquette skills are evident, keep yours on display at all times. Your reputation is at stake here as well.

Jacqueline Mansfield is president of Essential Etiquette, a company offering personal coaching and etiquette training for all levels of business. Reach her at EssEtiquette@aol.com or 303-888-7467.

All contents of this site © American City Business Journals Inc. All rights reserved.

DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, April 8, 2005

Good manners help increase sales

Denver Business Journal - by Jacqueline Mansfield Special to the Denver Business Journal

People buy people first, product second.

To the uninitiated, this means that if you're selling an amazing product but happen to be an ill-mannered, condescending lout, you risk losing that potential sale to a superior human, even if what they're offering is marginally less impressive or more costly.

It behooves all salespeople to put their best foot forward, displaying courtesy, consideration and empathy at all times.

Sales fall into two main categories.

- There's the order-taker, who offers telephone or counter service and works wherever the customer knows exactly what they want, intends to buy it and proceeds to offer payment in exchange for whatever it is.
- And there's the salesperson, whose job is to motivate and happily convince someone their life would be enhanced by purchasing something that they were either previously unaware or unsure of, or even thought they didn't want/need in the first place. To ensure proper sales etiquette is applied, here are some guidelines:
 - Always be appropriately well-groomed.
 - Most salespeople understand the value of a proper handshake. Sadly, some more aggressive types offer up a Neanderthal bonecrusher as if they have something to prove. This is distracting and, frankly, it hurts. Keep the pressure comfortably firm and brief, because if the recipient is still sore three minutes later, you'll lose their attention.
 - Discard the chewing gum and tobacco, even if you're selling horse manure to a garden center. It's uncouth.
 - After subjecting someone to your irresistible pitch, resulting in them telling you that they'd "like to think about it," it's inappropriate to reply "What with?" I know only one person who's disarmingly charismatic enough to get away with this and similar insults; the rest of us would be deemed unforgivably ill-mannered, resulting in a lost sale.

Asking what the person needs to think about is treading a fine line if not carefully cushioned in empathy. Build rapport, ask relevant questions, establish what the person really wants and then listen, listen, listen. Always remain courteous and noncombative.

- When a potential client/customer tells you what a good salesperson you are, smile politely and thank them, even if you sense this means you've quite likely blown it.

If you understand the principle that squeezing something tightly in your hand will force it out through your fingers, then you'll understand that applying overt pressure to a potential sale will contribute to you blowing it (again). The best salespeople aren't recognized by clients as such because the client feels their own best interests are being served. This happens when salespeople consistently extend empathy and consideration. If you think this approach wishy-washy, get off your behind and put yourself in front of more people. It's effective.

- If you work in a store on commission, it's polite to introduce yourself to the interested party, let them know you're available to help and then back off while keeping an eye out for them should they need assistance. To stalk them like a vulture waiting for its prey to expire is rude, makes you seem greedy and will harm your store's reputation, driving people away in droves.
- If you've helped someone with purchases and built a rapport with them, but aren't the person who takes their payment, be sure the cashier treats them with equal courtesy. You want this customer to return.

There's nothing more annoying than approaching a counter to make a request or purchase only to discover a witches' coven in full throttle, and to then find yourself totally ignored until they've finished carping or gossiping. If you're a culprit, remember the customer's payment is contributing to your salary, so treat them with respect and keep that behavior for the lunch break.

If you have a long line of frustrated shoppers to process, politely direct people to other cashiers if possible.

If someone tells you they're not interested in anything, respect this, because pouting is impolite and also makes you seem greedy.

- If someone returns something, they should never be humiliated. They deserve the same courtesy as a purchaser. Refer them to the original salesperson for exchanges.

In the event the item has been damaged by the returning person, there's no need to discuss this in any way other than politely, whilst explaining company policy. Attempting to embarrass a customer is discourteous, irrespective of how they might be behaving toward you.

Should it escalate out of control, have the manager intervene. If you happen to be the manager, invite them to your office for a private chat. Remember, you want this person to leave thinking highly of you and your company -- unless, of course, law enforcement becomes involved.

- Finally, and this applies to everyone whether you're making a sale, requesting a purchase, inquiring about a service, etc., remember that how the other person behaves toward you is about them, not you. Never take ownership of someone else's bad behavior.

If we keep this in mind, it will help us keep our own manners in check, thus elevating the buyer/seller experience overall.

Jacqueline Mansfield is president of Essential Etiquette, a company offering personal coaching and etiquette training for all levels of business. Reach her at EssEtiquette@aol.com or 303-888-7467.

DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, May 6, 2005

Bring your best behavior to all business meetings

Denver Business Journal - by Jacqueline Mansfield Special to the Denver Business Journal

Business meetings vary from the formal one on one to informal large groups. Regardless of what type of meeting you're attending, certain rules of etiquette always should apply.

For instance, it's essential you take all necessary steps to ensure you're on time. If you're late, the message you're telegraphing is that your time is more valuable than anyone else's. To start any meeting this way will breed resentment and you may certainly lose business opportunities because of it.

Everyone is occasionally unavoidably delayed, however. This is what cell phones are for. On the other hand, turning up too early is also annoying, so plan your arrival to be no more than five minutes ahead of the appointed time.

Assuming you've already established the appropriate dress code for the meeting and are on time, here are some further guidelines that will ensure your presence will be remembered positively, rather than being subjected to a character assassination behind your back.

- If it's a small group, introduce yourself to everyone. This means a proper, firm handshake, a few seconds of direct eye contact accompanied by a relaxed and friendly smile, an exchange of names and a few uncontroversial pleasantries. In larger groups, plan to introduce yourself to as many people as possible before the meeting commences.
- Turn off all electronic devices. If you're waiting for an important communication, notify the chairperson, or sit at the back if it's a large meeting. Nobody wants to hear a lunatic ring tone either, so keep everything on vibrate and leave the room discreetly when you need to.
- If an event calls for name tags and your name is spelled incorrectly, don't make a scene. Do quietly ask for a correctly handwritten alternative. If you're responsible for generating people's nametags, be aware that misspelled names are an indication of your indifference and sloppiness, so make every effort to get them right beforehand. Wear your nametag on your right lapel or in that area, because when you shake hands with someone, their eye is naturally drawn to the right.
- If refreshments are provided at the outset or at halftime, it's bad manners to continue to hang around the food and drink when the speaker or chairperson has started talking. It's also disconcerting to have to address a group of people who are busy stuffing their faces with food. Put your food and drink aside, and give your attention to whoever is addressing the meeting.
- On the subject of food, particularly in smaller, less-formal groups, if you absolutely must eat candy, nuts, etc., be sure to have enough to offer around. Otherwise, put them away. To do otherwise is ill-mannered. However, if you have a low-blood-sugar problem, then of course you've let others know this without drawing too much attention to your complaint, which also would be deemed gauche.
- Never, ever lose your temper. To lose one's temper is to lose one's manners. Angry, blame-laden discussions result in participants becoming defensive, and nothing is achieved. If you have a tough issue to resolve, make your point clearly with direct eye contact and without name-calling, in a calm, even-tempered tone.
- Whatever the circumstances, sit up straight and pay attention to your posture/body language.

Slouching makes you look like a bored and lazy slacker. Folded arms denote defensiveness and resistance.

Ostentatiously checking your wristwatch is rude. Repeated leg twitching or fiddling with your hair, fingernails, clothing, pen, etc., indicates that the only dialogue you're listening to is the one occurring in your own head. Sniggering, whispering, note-passing, etc., are the domain of fourth-graders.

- If there are empty chairs at the front of the meeting room, move forward, as there's nothing more ridiculous than having to address a full back half of a room. You won't be spat upon nor asked to perform on stage if you sit at the front. You'll simply be viewed as an interested participant. In the rare event you are asked to perform but feel reluctant, decline firmly and politely.
- If meeting minutes are taken, everyone attending must receive a copy afterwards. Failure to do so is impolite and leads to alienation. The same rule applies if you are bringing materials to a meeting. Be sure you bring enough copies for everyone.

It's polite to thank everyone who attended a meeting for their participation and contribution to the meeting, however small.

It's not considered bad manners to appear to be enjoying yourself or to spread some humor. If you can lighten the mood or tone of a tediously uninspiring meeting without stooping to un-PC comments, you will be well thought of.

Finally, remember that how you represent yourself or your company in any meeting will create a lasting impression that will be hard to shake off. Applying appropriate etiquette at all times will ensure that the lasting impression you create is a great one.

Jacqueline Mansfield is president of Essential Etiquette, a company offering personal coaching and etiquette training for all levels of business. Reach her at EssEtiquette@aol.com or 303-888-7467.

All contents of this site © American City Business Journals Inc. All rights reserved.

DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, June 3, 2005

Personal grooming makes powerful impression

Denver Business Journal - by Jacqueline Mansfield

The word "etiquette" means applying the correct rules of behavior in society and amongst members of a profession.

However, if you don't consider yourself to be a professional -- such as a lawyer, banker, management consultant, etc. -- don't fall into the trap of believing the rules don't apply to you, because they do. Whatever your job, we all have to co-exist in society and in the workplace no matter our career paths. So applying good manners at all times should ensure that both your career and social life run more smoothly.

That said, even if you believe you've successfully cultivated good manners, offering up a dirty hand to shake or wearing a food-stained outfit at work will instantaneously diminish the positive effect of your firm handshake and will taint the other person's opinion of you.

The visual impression you present is both immediate and permanent. Obviously this is particularly crucial in a business setting, as nobody will object if you're in the middle of weeding your garden or feeding rambunctious children.

Personal taste also plays a role here, so a safe bet is to decide upon a working wardrobe that corresponds to the same level of formality as your superior's.

However, this doesn't mean you have to dress in the same style. It's helpful to view your business clothes as you would a school uniform. That's because though nobody really likes them, they serve a useful purpose. They level the playing field, minimizing distractions, and help to keep one's mind on one's work.

Outside of the workplace, dress as you like. But here's a caveat -- it won't enhance your professional image to be seen in public by a business colleague/client looking like an unwashed grub or as a 30-something posing as Britney.

Assuming that you care what others think of you, and assuming you want to advance your career, here are some guidelines that will ensure your personal grooming complements your excellent manners:

- Always have clean, well-groomed hands and fingernails. If your nail polish is chipped, remove it. This also applies to pedicures if your feet are on display, ladies.

Gentlemen, keep nails short and clean. In both cases, keep rings to a maximum of one per hand.

- Wear clean clothes to work. This includes shoes, which should never be down-at-heel or scruffy. If your work is dirty, cover yourself up with appropriate outerwear.

Be aware that in a business environment, very tight clothing on anyone is inappropriate and looks suggestive. Also be aware that if you have a larger build, tight clothing will serve to make you seem even larger. Avoiding short, clingy outfits that have horizontal lines traversing your widest parts will help to

reduce the overall impression of largeness.

- Vertical lacquered bangs and mullets are not only passé but look ridiculous. Hair should be neat and natural for both sexes. I recommend visiting a reputable hairstylist who will tell you the truth about your choice of hair style and color. Take their advice and abandon the style and color that everyone said suited you when you were 20 years younger.
- Ladies should avoid piling on thick makeup. Keep it subtle for daytime. If you wish to trowel it on in the evening, that's your affair, but remember that you don't want to be deemed schizophrenic by a superior whom you accidentally meet. It may reduce your promotion prospects if you're seen emulating Elvira.
- Perfume should be discreet. Lightly spray the space in front of you and walk into it. That is quite enough. If colleagues object to your fragrance, stop wearing it. That goes for both sexes.
- It's in poor taste to wear your entire jewelry collection at one time. A good rule of thumb is that when you're tempted to pile on an extra piece, take a piece or two off instead. Remove all but a couple of ear piercings and cover tattoos.
- Personal hygiene is a sticky subject. If you have any doubts regarding your own aura, ask someone you trust to tell you the truth. You may consider asking if colleagues continually flinch away from you. Make it easy on them by asking if they think your current antiperspirant or mouthwash is effective.

If you're the one having to answer this question and the person clearly needs advice, simply recommend a good alternative while making a slight self-deprecating comment to prevent any possible hurt feelings. "I had to change mine a while ago" will suffice.

The person who doesn't ask yet needs to be fumigated should be left to the ministrations of the Human Resources department; notify the appropriate person that someone needs guidance and let them handle it.

- Finally, just because no one comments on the fact that you dress like a biker chick at work when everyone else is sporting Brooks Brothers doesn't mean it's acceptable. They may be too nervous to confront you. Revert to the school uniform rule and you'll blend in nicely.

Besides, it's much better if people notice you for your excellent work instead.

Jacqueline Mansfield is president of Essential Etiquette, a company offering personal coaching and etiquette training for all levels of business. Reach her at EssEtiquette@aol.com or 303-888-7467.

All contents of this site © American City Business Journals Inc. All rights reserved.

DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, July 1, 2005

Networking events: Wise to be on your best behavior

Denver Business Journal - by Jacqueline Mansfield

The term "networking" can polarize people.

For instance, there are business owners who know that the success of their business depends primarily on networking rather than traditional advertising. To them, networking is what it's all about. Also, any successful marketing, public relations or media relations executive will tell you that the excellent contacts they've cultivated through the years increase their net worth in their industry.

On the other hand, who amongst us hasn't inwardly shuddered upon hearing those cringe-worthy words, "Hi, I've just started my own business selling 'cosmeceuticals.' May I borrow your address book?" or "I'm hosting an event for nutritional supplements. Please bring your checkbook and 12 friends."

There's nothing wrong with networking. The problem lies in the way it's evolved. Proper networking should be a give-and-take transaction. But as people become more driven, self-serving and -- frankly -- ill-mannered, the rest of us become increasingly nervous upon hearing the words, "network marketing" or "multilevel marketing." Today, many companies looking to recruit people actually stress "Not MLM" in job postings, because they know MLM has the same effect as "Deet."

Organized networking events are a great idea, however, because almost everyone attending wants to network. They don't normally involve bait-and-switch tactics unless halfway through the event, you find yourself being press-ganged into parting with hundreds of dollars and committing to a "seminar" without guaranteed results.

Here are some guidelines to help restore positive opinion on the subject:

- It's important to remember you're not the only one looking for contacts at an event, so prepare to put yourself out for others, especially if you expect that from them. If you offer to make introductions on someone's behalf, it's ill-mannered not to. No matter the circumstances, trying to impress others by boasting about your own brilliant connections without the follow-through guarantees the opposite result.
- Always carry clean, up-to-date business cards and other materials to hand out at an event, after politely asking if you may. Never refuse anything offered to you, as that would be rude. Dispose of it later, if you must. If you're looking to cultivate specific business contacts, dress appropriately for that business.
- Always respect the 18 inches of sacred space around people. Don't be a "space invader" by shoving your face 2 inches from theirs or touching them beyond a proper handshake.
- If you've just subjected someone to a lengthy sales process, it demonstrates appalling manners to then push a piece of paper under their nose, demanding they write names and contact info of a dozen people.

If requesting referrals is crucial to your business, always mention this before you make the sale. Let the customer know that in exchange for the wonderful service they will receive from you, you'll be asking them for the names of a few people who think they (the customer) are great.

Specifically, you want to avoid being fobbed off with the names of the customer's neighbor's second cousin twice removed or anyone else they barely know. You need good, quality referrals so that when you call these people, the response is positive because they really respect the referee.

In exchange for this, you must give excellent service. No one will give you quality referrals if they were pressured in any way. They won't subject anyone they care for to the same treatment.

- If your business is multilevel marketing and you're looking to recruit, let people know at the outset. This won't necessarily be a deterrent if you're polite, charming, genuinely interested in the other person and present the opportunity well. If all this is beyond you, change your career.

You'll find out what people's true opinion of you really is when you approach everyone you know to ask them for referrals. If the referrals you get are poor quality, then unfortunately, you aren't as popular as you think. If the referrals are good, but you fail to make a sale, you need to review the desirability of the product you're touting.

People buy people first, product second. But if the product is an engineering piece for a Russian hybrid motor-scooter, don't expect to get wealthy.

- Finally, people who network successfully share several attributes:

- (1) They're always interested in the needs of others and employ a give-and-take philosophy.
- (2) They maintain contact with their contacts.
- (3) They're usually fun to be with and, therefore, everyone wants to include them in their circle. They're always businesslike, they keep their word and they deliver on promises.
- (4) If they host networking sales events in their homes, they ensure that everyone has fun and isn't put under any pressure to buy. They understand that networking is a numbers game, and that the more they network, the luckier they'll become. Above all, they're never rude, impolite or boorish.

Bottom line: Applying good manners in all dealings with complete strangers will help increase your chances of making valuable new business connections.

Jacqueline Mansfield is president of Essential Etiquette, a company offering personal coaching and etiquette training for all levels of business. Reach her at EssEtiquette@aol.com or 303-888-7467.

All contents of this site © American City Business Journals Inc. All rights reserved.