

Workplace Etiquette

Unfortunately, when starting a new job, it is very unlikely that you will find your workplace **etiquette** written down. Usually the rules are already part of the work environment, and you will need to pick up on them by observing your surroundings. But here are some tips on workplace **etiquette** to consider:

1. Telephone use:

As a general rule, don't make or receive personal phone calls or texts while at work. Ask your family and friends not to call you at work. If there is an emergency (e.g. a call from your family doctor or your children's teacher), and you are not allowed to use the phone except on your breaks, let your supervisor know and arrange for a co-worker to cover for you while you take the call. Don't check your phone for messages during your work hours. During lunch and coffee breaks, instead of playing with your cell phone, pay attention to and engage with those around you because this helps to build good working relationships. During breaks, keep your cell phone on vibrate and speak quietly if you need to accept or make a call.

2. Dress code and accessories:

If your company doesn't have a written dress code, take notice of how your co-workers and supervisors dress. Save the see-through dresses, sandals with socks, Lycra bike shorts, muscle shirts, tight jeans, short skirts and plunging necklines for other occasions. If you wear perfume, be aware that others might have allergies, so don't use too much. **Tip:** If people are able to tell without seeing you that you are coming or have just left, you are probably wearing too much perfume. Perfume or cologne is not a solution for body odour and bad breath. If these are problems for you, make sure to address them appropriately. Also excessive make-up and flashy jewellery can disagree with your company's workplace etiquette, as well as extremely long nails and eccentric or chipping nail polish.

3. Have you asked permission?

Don't borrow your co-workers' work tools, equipment, or office stationary without their permission. If you have their permission, remember to say "thank you" and to return the item borrowed in a timely manner and in good condition. Don't "borrow" other people's food.

4. Clean up after yourself:

Don't expect others to clean up after you. Label your food (if it is part of your workplace etiquette), when using your company's fridge and remember to throw out the food you won't eat. There is nothing ruder than leaving your mouldy and stinky food for your co-worker to clean up at the end of the week or month. Do your dishes and remember to clean any food left over on the sink and counters. If you make a mess, be considerate of your co-workers and clean it up. Regarding using the bathroom, if you use the last of the toilet paper or if the toilet is clogged, as a courtesy, write a little note and stick it to the bathroom door and also report it to the person responsible for the up keep of the bathroom.

5. Don't participate in work gossip:

When starting a new job, some of your new co-workers may choose to share their gossip with you. It could be an attempt to make you an ally in their workplace politics, or it could be because you are just someone new to spread the rumours. Either way, the rule here is to protect your reputation for fairness by not engaging in work gossip. **Tip:** When someone is gossiping, you can try to use the following statements to end the conversation without insulting the gossiper:

- It sounds like you are having a hard time with him/her.
- I haven't notice it.
- You sound really upset. How are you going to resolve this?

Eavesdropping as well as over-sharing about your own personal life should be avoided. Remember, you want to build a good reputation at your new workplace.

6. Punctuality:

You may think that being 5 or 10 minutes late to work won't make a difference to your work. It might be true (note that in some jobs such as receptionist, security guards and so on it probably will), but lateness may cause you to be thought of as someone who doesn't care about work and is unreliable. You may also upset your co-workers who are on time everyday for work; they may think that your being late is not fair to them. Be on time for work every day, and on your first day make sure to be at least 15 minutes early. If you will be late for work (and life happens), contact your supervisor and let him/her know as soon as possible. Also be mindful of you co-workers when taking your lunch, coffee and bathroom breaks, especially if you have someone covering for you. Be considerate of their time and be back from your breaks on time. Avoid missing work days, but if you are sick and contagious, stay home to keep from spreading the bug to others. Try to book doctor appointments outside of work time. If that's not possible, choose early mornings or the end of day, or a time that will have less impact on your work.

7. Monkey see, monkey do:

Just because your co-worker behaves badly (e.g. being late, gossiping and making a mess), it is not an excuse for you to follow his/her behaviour or to forget about good workplace etiquette. Always keep your integrity by doing the right thing, even if you're doing it alone. It matters and will be noticed.

8. Discriminatory comments are never acceptable:

Canadian workplaces are ethnically diverse with people from different cultures, religions, sexual orientation and national backgrounds. We all need to have a tolerant and inclusive attitude. Consider the following:

- When working with people from different backgrounds, learn the appropriate terms for the ethnic groups, religions, and nationalities of your co-workers. You can show interest and politely ask your co-worker to learn more. Be genuine when asking questions. Do not use slang or judgmental terms that you may have used before. Showing respect for others is a recipe for a healthy and enjoyable workplace.
- There is nothing more inappropriate and impolite than referring to others by race or ethnic identity. Use names and titles, and if you don't know, ask.
- Mature workers often bring experience and expertise to the workplace, and young people often bring energy and new ideas. Both of them should be valued for their potential and contributions.

- Be alert to people's special needs. If one of your fellow workers must be absent for a religious observance, for instance, you could offer to help cover some of his/her responsibilities for the day.
- Sexist and homophobic comments are unacceptable. Independently of sexual orientation, both men and women should be treated equally at the workplace and deserve respect.

9. Dealing with conflicts:

If a co-worker's performance is impacting your ability to perform your job well, address the situation directly with him/her. Politely and clearly say how his/her behaviour is affecting you and kindly request a change in the way things are being done. If everything goes well and your co-workers address your concern, make sure to say "thank you". But if the problem continues, you may have to take your concern to your supervisor.

10. Grievance:

If you have a complaint about your workplace and your company doesn't have a grievance policy, you can speak with your immediate supervisor. If you are not satisfied with the outcome of your conversation, you can request that your supervisor inform you about the next step in the process. Do not go over your boss's head, it could upset him/her and damage your relationship.

11. Have you posted, tweeted or blogged today?

You should not use social media at all at your workplace, unless it is part of your job to use the social media to post information about your organization. Also, when using Facebook, Twitter etc. outside of your work environment make sure that none of the information released is work related. Bad mouthing your employers, supervisors or co-workers can create a lot of trouble for you, and worse, it can cost you your job. **Tip:** When using social media to write or post a picture, ask yourself the following question: would it be okay to have this information on the first page of a newspaper? If your answer is yes, then go ahead and share your thoughts and pictures; otherwise don't click on the post button.

12. Say you are sorry and mean it:

Insincere apologies won't have the same effect as when you really mean it, and they can even make matters worse. Apologize immediately after an incident and offer to make things right if possible.