

# The Workplace

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## A Fact Sheet

### Highlights

Six underlying principles of business etiquette are:

1. *Be on time*
2. *Be discreet*
3. *Be considerate, respectful, and upbeat*
4. *Dress appropriately*
5. *Be concerned with others*
6. *Use correct grammar—written and spoken.*

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## Business Etiquette for Today's Workers

Business etiquette is another term for manners. No one was ever hired or promoted simply because he or she had good manners; however, being polite and considerate in business and work dealings may favorably tip the scales between two who are equally qualified. Having good business manners typically enhance chances of being promoted once hired.

Business etiquette is based on practicality—in other words, doing what generally makes sense. Unlike social etiquette which has its roots in gender and chivalry, “business etiquette is based on hierarchy and power . . .” (Klinkenberg, 2000). The work environment is gender neutral and is no place to perform or expect old-fashioned gallantry. Both men and women should be treated equally and with the respect their positions deem appropriate. The issues of holding the door open, pulling out a chair or helping someone with his or her coat are often awkward and confusing in the business world. Men want to act like gentlemen, and women want to be perceived as competent professionals. A rule of thumb to help you know what is the most appropriate behavior in similar situations is to “. . . ask yourself if courtesy would demand that you [perform the same courtesy] for someone who is the same gender” (Klinkenberg, 2000).



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Business etiquette goes beyond the scope of gender rules. Good manners or etiquette apply to most areas of our work lives. For example, the areas that need the most work include the way we communicate in writing, orally, and electronically; how we greet and address people; the manner we conduct business; our mode of dress; and the way we conduct ourselves. (These and related topics will be discussed in greater detail in a later issue of *The Workplace*.)

Regardless of the work environment or your position, according to Dr. Jan Yager, business etiquette has six underlying principles. These are: be on time, be discreet, be courteous and positive, be concerned with others, dress appropriately, and use proper language both when writing and when speaking.

1. *Be on time.* Continually being tardy is an indicator that you do not value the time consideration of others, including your employer. To most business establishments, time is money. Being slow to complete work costs your employer money and you your employer's confidence.
2. *Be discreet.* Whether it's a company secret or something a co-worker has told you, keep confidences to yourself. Betraying others hurts them and destroys their trust in you.
3. *Be considerate, respectful, and upbeat.* Both superiors and subordinates typically appreciate your projecting a positive, professional image for both the company and yourself while dealing with clients, colleagues, and other employees. Consistent congenial behavior generally improves the work climate for all.
4. *Dress appropriately.* Choice of dress for both men and women should be consistent with the level of your position and your company/business' dress policy. Dressing too casually or too poorly can block promotions. Equally damaging is overdressing which can also hurt your ability to advance. Overdressing may

lead to suspicion, jealousy and mistrust.

5. *Be concerned with others.* Taking time to understand circumstances from the viewpoint of others, regardless of their positions, places most in a favorable light. Your co-workers, clients, and subordinates will enjoy your consideration and will enjoy working with you as will your superiors who are in positions to reward you.

*“Business etiquette is based on practicality . . .”*

6. *Use correct grammar—written and spoken.* The ability to apply the rules of grammar correctly and to communicate clearly and concisely is an advantage in the working world. Those who can clearly make their points quickly improve their chances of moving ahead in a business setting.

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**Sources:**

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