
PROFESSIONAL ETIQUETTE

Guide



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REASONS FOR PROFESSIONAL ETIQUETTE

All professionals, especially lawyers, benefit from exercising professional etiquette. Professional etiquette is present in an individual's work life, including introductions, meetings, communications, and dining situations. Professional etiquette can create a more comfortable setting, enabling a free flow of dialogue, or a more formal interaction when necessary. This skill set gives you a significant advantage in a business setting.



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TEXAS YOUNG LAWYERS ASSOCIATION

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INTRODUCTIONS

Use your full name.

In a business situation, use your full name, and observe how others would prefer to be introduced. If your name is long or difficult to pronounce, you may consider giving a business card in your initial meeting.

Stand while being introduced.

Standing helps establish your presence. You make it easy for others to ignore you if you don't stand. If you choose to remain seated, you should lean forward to shake hands.

Use a firm handshake and make eye contact while shaking hands.

A firm handshake demonstrates confidence and a desire to learn more about the person you are meeting. The same is true for eye contact.

Follow your office dress code, and or even dress a step above the norm for your office.

Your attire should express confidence and competency. Dress for success.

Carry a presentable briefcase or bag.

If your briefcase or bag is messy it will likely distract from your professional presence. If you carry a leather briefcase or bag, be sure to polish and condition it regularly.

Be alert.

Appearing sleepy or distracted in the workplace looks unprofessional.

Always be kind and courteous.

Kindnesses and courtesy go a long way. You never know when you'll receive them yourself.

Wear minimal jewelry.

Piercings are typically not advisable in most offices save for traditional earrings. Keep other jewelry simple and tasteful.

Visible tattoos should be covered.

Opinions on body art vary, so the best practice is to keep it covered. Better safe than sorry. Know your audience.

Grooming is important.

Men should either be clean-shaven or keep facial hair well groomed. Avoid outlandish hairstyles. Unnatural hair colors are generally prohibited in most professional environments. Keep fingernails clean and neatly trimmed or filed. Women should keep make-up simple and fresh-looking. Never groom yourself in public.

Use perfume or cologne with caution.

Some people are very sensitive to smells or may even be allergic to your perfume or cologne, so it is best to limit your use of scent, or not wear any at all.

PEOPLE AT WORK

Don't cross your legs.

Both men and women do it, but it can be distracting. Women should be especially careful if wearing a skirt or dress. Crossing your legs also hinders circulation due to the increased pressure on the veins.

Learn names and learn them quickly.

People notice when you do not remember their name and may perceive this as a sign you do not value them.

A good tip for remembering names is to use a person's name three times during your first conversation with them. Write names down and keep business cards.

Don't make value judgments on people's importance in the workplace.

Remember to treat everyone with respect, not just people whom you think can advance your cause.

Would the differences in your treatment of these people create a negative image for you? If so, start the process of reworking the relationship dynamics, and look for ways to assist and support others.

What you discuss with others about your personal life is your choice, but be careful.

What you tell others can affect how they view you as a person. Don't ask others to share their personal lives with you. This makes many people uncomfortable in the work space. Instead, let people volunteer such information.

COMMUNICATING

Return phone calls and emails within 24 hours.

At a minimum, reply to say that you will provide the requested information or a more substantive response at a later date. Do not send an email in response to a phone call unless it's necessary or you have tried to return the call and have been unsuccessful.

Ask before putting someone on speakerphone.

It is not polite to put someone on speakerphone unknowingly.

Be polite to everyone with whom you speak.

Never be rude to administrative secretaries or other support staff who may answer your call. The practice is unprofessional, and you can be assured that the person that you are trying to reach will hear about it and this will lower his or her opinion of you.

Identify yourself.

Clearly state your first and last name to the person answering the call, and let them know the reason for your call.

Ask if this is a good time to talk.

Once you've been connected to the person you were calling, ask him or her if this is a good time to talk, especially if you anticipate that your call will last longer than a few minutes. If you know that a particular call will be lengthy, try to schedule the call in advance.

When leaving a voicemail, be sure to leave certain information.

Speak in a pleasant tone, be clear and concise, and be sure to leave your first and last name, your telephone number, and a brief explanation of the purpose of your call. Speak clearly and slowly enough so the listener won't have to replay the message repeatedly to gather the information.

Use a friendly tone and greeting.

When you pick up the phone, smile as you say, "Hello." Smiling affects the way you speak, and will cause you to sound more pleasant.

Remember your surroundings when using cell phones for business or professional calls.

Move to a quiet spot before making a call on your cell phone. This shows respect for those around you who do not wish to hear your call as well as respect for the person you call who would be forced to struggle to understand you through background noise. This means don't talk on your phone in the elevator.

Use smart email etiquette.

When emailing, use the subject box, and make sure it directly relates to what you are writing. This allows both you and the recipient a way to quickly reference the email later.

Underlining, italicizing, bolding, coloring, and changing font size can make a mild email message seem overly strong or aggressive, or perhaps unprofessional.

Do not attach large, unnecessary files. Only send necessary attachments to prevent wasting the recipient's time and inbox space.

Do not send or forward jokes, chain letters, virus hoaxes, etc. Do not e-mail this type of material to your professional e-mail contacts as it is unprofessional and wastes the recipient's time.

When sending confidential information, do so with care. Keep in mind that e-mail is not guaranteed to be confidential. If you need to relay sensitive information, it may be best to handle it in person or at least through a secure message system.

MEETINGS

Confirm your attendance as soon as possible.

If you can no longer attend a meeting, inform the other people attending as soon as possible and offer a sincere apology for any inconvenience.

For a meeting in someone's office, don't arrive more than five minutes early.

The person you are meeting with may need the time to prepare for your meeting or do other work. Arriving too early may make them uncomfortable, and that is not a good way to begin your meeting.

Don't arrive late . . . ever.

If you must be late to a meeting, notify the other person in advance. Arriving on time means arriving five minutes early.

Be prepared.

Know what the meeting goals are and bring a written list of any questions or ideas that you may have thought of. Always bring a pen and notepad for meeting notes. Be sure to bring any additional materials that you are expected to have.

Do not allow cell phone interruptions.

Turn your cell phone off or on mute. Do not check your missed calls or messages during professional meetings or conversations. This may be interpreted as a sign of disrespect or disinterest in the meeting.

Only say "thank you" once or twice during a conversation.

Saying "thank you" too often dilutes the term.

Keep your fingers together when you point.

Pointing with one finger appears more aggressive than a full, open hand.

Avoid confrontation.

There is a time and place for confrontation, and a meeting is almost never that place. Rather than resolve the conflict or other issues that have arisen, you will likely embarrass and anger the people in the meeting.

WORK SPACE

Keep your work space professional and neat with appropriate personal touches.

People will consider your work space a reflection of you.

Whether it is a cubicle or an office, respect the work spaces of others.

Don't just walk in. Instead, knock or make your presence gently known. Don't assume acknowledgement of your presence is an invitation to sit down; wait until you are invited to do so.

Don't interrupt someone on the phone, and don't try to communicate with them verbally or with sign language.

You could damage an important phone call.

Food consumption should be regulated.

Smells and noise from food can be distracting to others trying to work.

DINING

Wait to sit until the host/hostess indicates the seating arrangement.

Never pull out someone's chair for them.

It is perfectly fine to hold open a door for your guest, but you should not pull their chair out for them regardless of gender. In a business setting, you should leave those social gender rules behind.

Place your napkin in your lap.

When taking a seat at a dining table, be sure to place your napkin in your lap after everyone is seated. Placing your napkin in your lap should be one of the first things that you do.

When ordering, keep in mind that this is a talking business lunch.

Order something easy to eat, such as boneless chicken or fish.

The purpose of a business lunch is to discuss business, not your dining experience. Keep your meal simple so that you can focus on the conversation.

Do not hold the order up. Feel free to ask for suggestions from others at the table.

Alternatively, review the menu in advance of the lunch, if possible.

Wait to eat until everyone has been served.

Beginning your meal before others have been served is inconsiderate. Additionally, pacing your meal with others at your table is important. You can't pace if you finish before others have started, and you don't want everyone to wait for you to finish if you eat slowly.

Keep hands in lap unless you are using them to eat.

Business lunches are not the time for playing charades or taking a nap.

Take responsibility for keeping up the conversation.

There is no excuse letting a conversation fall flat. Take an active interest in those around you.

Place napkin on chair seat if excusing yourself for any reason.

If you need to wash up or otherwise leave the table, place your napkin in the chair seat or to the left of your plate.

Place napkin beside plate at the end of the meal.

On the other hand, set the napkin beside your plate when you finish. Such napkin placement signals your server accordingly.

Push chair under table when excusing yourself.

Don't leave your chair pulled out. It blocks the server and others from walking around the table.

Never ask for a to-go box.

It is perfectly acceptable to take to-go boxes when eating with your family. The same is not true for professional settings.

The host should always pay.

If you did the inviting, you are the host, and you should pay the bill, regardless of gender. However, you should never fight over a bill.

Do not push away or stack your dishes.

Let your server do their job. Of course, don't create unnecessary work for your server.

Keep the food options balanced with your guest.

This means that if your guest orders an appetizer or dessert, you should follow suit. Don't make your guest feel awkward by eating a course alone.

EATING

Always break bread with your hands.

Never use your knife to cut your rolls at a business meal. Break your bread in half and tear off one piece at a time. From there, butter each piece as you are ready to eat it.

Start eating with the implement that is farthest away from your plate.

Dip soup away from you; sip from the side of the spoon.

Season food only after you have tasted it.

Pass salt and pepper together—even if asked for only one.

Pass all items to the right.

If the item has a handle, such as a pitcher, pass with the handle toward the next person. For bowls with spoons, pass with the spoon ready for the next person. If you are the one to reach to the center of the table for an item, pass it before serving yourself.

While you are speaking during a meal, utensils should be resting on plate (fork and knife crossed on the plate with tines down).

Don't chew with your mouth open or blow on your food.

If you need to use the restroom, excuse yourself.

Should you have to remove food from your teeth, take medication, or groom yourself in any way during the meal. These things should never be done at the table.

SOCIAL OCCASIONS

Prepare a polite exit.

Remember to leave when you are talking. At that point, you are in control, and it is a much smoother exit. It's nice to have preplanned "exit lines" such as: "Nice to meet you" or "Nice talking to you" or "See you next week at the meeting." You can also excuse yourself for a bathroom break, to get food, or say you wanted to catch someone before they leave.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Don't falsely pretend to know a foreign language.

Knowing a language makes an excellent impression on the people you are doing business with. Barely knowing the language, but feigning fluency, could really harm the work you are trying to accomplish.

Be mindful of time zones.

You don't want to wake someone up on their cell phone or call someone with an unreasonable deadline or concern at an awkward time of day for them.

As there is no standard global work day, you should keep in mind that work hours vary from country to country. This is important when scheduling meetings or conference calls.

Know the holidays that will be observed, and be respectful of the time surrounding the holidays, as people may be less available.

Meals can be extremely crucial in making a positive international business etiquette impression.

The customs that are followed when dining are often very important, and mistakes in this area could be costly. Knowing the etiquette well in advance should allow you to relax and enjoy what could be an amazing new experience. Before meeting with someone from another country, research basic formalities and customs that are routinely used in the country's business community because there may be differences in their accepted professional etiquette than outlined above in this guidebook.

REFERENCES

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— NOTES —

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