

Workplace etiquette is never out of style

While so many things have become more casual in today's world, professionalism in the workplace is a standard that should not be compromised. More and more often, Ease@Work hears about issues that arise in the workplace that could have been minimized, if not avoided all together had there been certain expectations of etiquette and proper behaviors when at work.

Take for example:

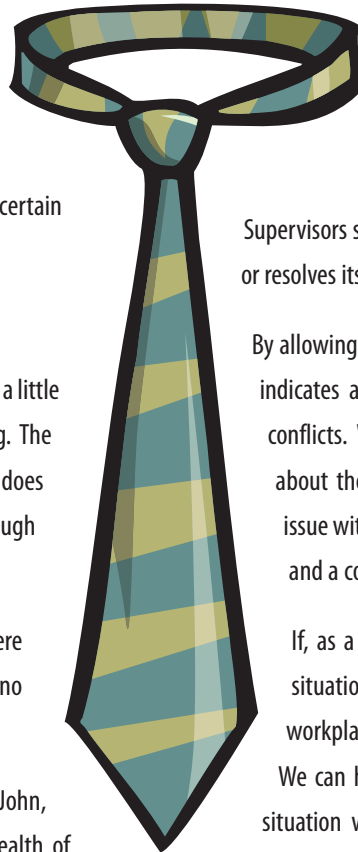
Mary... who works in an office and wears her skirts a little too short, a little too tight and her shirts a little too low and a little too revealing. The company has a policy that states dress is "business casual," but what does that mean? Other people in the office talk about Mary's attire and laugh behind her back.

Or, what about Joe... who works in a service-oriented industry, where clients can be present at any time, yet he talks to his coworkers like no one else is around, using inappropriate language and profanities?

Perhaps the lack of professionalism is a little more subtle... there's John, who has worked at the company for over 15 years and has a wealth of knowledge and is well-respected. Yet, when change comes to the workplace, he talks negatively about management's vision and the changes that are being implemented.

Spelling out your organization's expectations is a good start in encouraging and maintaining workplace etiquette and professionalism. A dress code policy, code of conduct, ethics code, and mission or vision statement are all examples of official statements that speak to some aspect of workplace professionalism. These written statements—presented at employee orientations and handbooks and periodically reviewed—help clarify expectations.

Another way to refresh awareness is to offer a seminar on workplace professionalism, business etiquette or ethics training. Topics such as professionalism can be general, or focus on a specific topic, such as phone or email etiquette, appropriate dress and appearance, or the importance of customer-sensitive employee behavior.



If you need ideas for short presentations during staff meetings or if you'd like a seminar, Ease@Work can help.

Of course, violations of policy and inappropriate behaviors should be documented and addressed immediately. Managers/Supervisors should never turn their heads and hope the problem goes away or resolves itself.

By allowing Mary to continue dressing in an inappropriate fashion not only indicates a weakness in enforcing policy, but it also can lead to other conflicts. What happens if Mary hears another employee complaining about the way she dresses, yet management has never addressed the issue with her? Mary could feel management is OK with how she dresses and a conflict with the other worker could become an issue.

If, as a manager/supervisor, you have a concern about a behavior or situation you believe breaches your organization's expectations of workplace professionalism, call your account manager for a consultation. We can help with policy review, discuss techniques for addressing the situation with the employee and guide you through what could be a difficult conversation, and if need be, provide you with guidance in making a management referral.

And even if your workplace is one that is more casual—perhaps it's a manufacturing environment where customers are not usually on-site, or maybe your employees work remotely and have more flexibility

than most—there is still a case for basic policies, albeit policies appropriate to your workplace. Do not discount the need for professionalism. Every company has "customers" who have certain expectations. Be aware of your internal and external customers needs in terms of etiquette and professionalism.

A survey by TheLadders.com of more than 2,000 executives, found that 98.7% of senior managers believe there is such a thing as workplace etiquette. More than 75% said they would fire an employee for bad office manners.



WE KNOW PEOPLE

Dress for success

We know people! EASE@Work is connected to an extensive network of specialists who support the unique needs of Human Resources.

If you're not sure if we can help you with your needs, just ask!

Here's an example of how we can help:

Q: We have a work team that consists of four men and one woman. This group routinely works off-site together and the nature of their work isolates them from other staff. A supervisor recently made a site visit and overheard the men having a conversation of a sexually explicit nature. The woman in the work team was present, but she was not participating in the conversation. The supervisor is afraid if customers overheard this conversation, they might be offended, but he doesn't want to reprimand the whole group. How should we handle this?

A: Your question raises more than a concern about offending customers, it also causes concern regarding potential harassment issues. One of the first questions to ask would be "Does your organization have a harassment policy?" The second question would be, "Have all staff, including managers and supervisors, been made aware of the policy and trained appropriately?"

Not only is the conversation inappropriate in a work environment, but if these conversations occur repeatedly, or if they take place with the knowledge, or intent, of making the woman in the team uncomfortable, then your company may have more than an unhappy customer on their hands. You could have a potential harassment claim.

Harassment policies need to be clearly stated and all employees, including managers and supervisors, need to know their responsibilities regarding harassment in the workplace. Even if this woman has not formally complained, harassment may be taking place. And, now that you have awareness regarding this inappropriate conversation, the manager and your organization has a responsibility to address it.

Business Y believed there were a few employees who had been abusing their ability to dress as they pleased by coming to work quite disheveled and with an overall sloppy appearance. Some staff would report to work in sweatshirts and jeans, prominently display distracting face piercings, or arrive unshaven, even though the company often had outside visitors who expected a more professional looking workforce. Business Y contacted EASE for advice.

EASE asked exploratory questions and immediately noticed the lack of a formal dress code policy. EASE offered to assist in sharing some language and help the organization develop a policy that was practical and straightforward. In the meantime, the EASE Account Manager pointed out that if the employees had been addressed about their appearance and expectations were clearly explained, yet they still continued to report to work looking unprofessional, then a formal management referral may be an option.

The consultation helped Business Y to formulate a plan of action to address the offenders. In addition, EASE was asked to conduct a "Professionalism in the Workplace" seminar for the company. The seminar addressed both the importance of one's appearance along with other issues related to professionalism and etiquette.

If your organization struggles with instances of unprofessional dress or lack of etiquette, call us for information as to how we can help!

'Wellness Way' and Ease at the NOHRC

Hope you will see us (or did see us!) at the 2011 NOHRC at the IX-Center on March 11. Ease@Work was happy to be a sponsor on "Wellness Way" at this year's event.

Patrick Gaul, Sales Manager, and Stephanie Patek, Account Manager and Certified Fitness Coach, spent the day talking with attendees about how Ease@Work is not just an EAP, but we're a wellness company too.

We were also happy to see a number of Ease@Work speakers featured at the 2011 NOHRC. If you caught presentations by Susan Aldrich, Tameka Taylor, Ruth Ramos, or Jim Smith, and would like to bring one of their programs to your site, we can do that! Ease@Work is connected to these top notch speakers, along with a number of other subject matter experts to meet your training and wellness-related needs.



What have you missed at Interact@EASE?

Visit www.easeatwork.com and click on the "Visit our blog" link for the latest conversations about human resource, EAP and wellness-related topics.