

# Notes on business communication etiquette

Business



Today the business world is supposed to be in a state of “manners crisis”. In our increasingly high-tech, impersonal world, the sensitivity inherent in good etiquette has become an important counterbalance. Also, boundaries in business have extended in all directions. Women have entered the business world in great numbers. People from different cultures interact. Factors such as these increase the need to avoid communication that offends or causes misunderstanding. At the same time, baby-boomers now moving into the executive were mostly not trained in manners.

They feel uncomfortable because of their lack of social graces. Discomfort on both sides is not the only result. Those practicing poor etiquette lose the competitive edge to those who know what to do and do it with grace – in starting salaries, promotions, attracting and keeping clients, inducing the cooperation of subordinates, etc. Good business etiquette pays, both in intangible and tangible ways. There is certainly more you can add on telephone communication etiquette. Manners are particularly important when speaking on the phone because facial expression and body language are lost. Besides that, we spend a lot of time on the phone. A disgruntled or uninterested voice, poor diction, sentences laced with “you know’s”, and nonstandard grammar all present a very negative image. People with heavy accents need to speak even more slowly and carefully than others.

Someone may ask about what to do if the person on the other end of the conversation is rude – and is also an important person. That person may be smoking, chewing gum, talking to other people in the room, etc. Often there is nothing that can be done except to endure and be unfailingly polite in return. But it is all right to ask the person to repeat what he or she has said

(plead a poor connection). Better yet, whenever possible, arrange for face to face business meetings, and keep them as brief and to the point as possible.

Another question that may arise is how to end telephone conversations courteously with people who ramble, leaving the listener in the dark about the point of the call, who race on without giving the listener a chance to speak (especially when the listener knows the caller should speak to someone else), or who repeats the same information, important though it may be, more than once. Hanging up is usually not an option in business.

With ramblers, the best strategy is to interject a direct question: "What exactly do you have in mind?" And the listener may need to add that he or she has an appointment so hasn't much time. \* With racers, the listener, while avoiding outright rudeness, can only talk over the caller, interrupting with a statement about whom the call needs to be directed, say that the call will be transferred; and then quickly transfer the call. It is a good idea, though, to give the caller the name and number he or she needs in case the transfer fails.

With repeaters, the listener needs to assert control. One way is to summarize the key points of what the caller has said, say the two will talk later, and close the call with a polite "Thank you. Goodbye." You might want to add some other telephone tips that are part of good business communication etiquette such as answering the call on the first or second ring, explaining delays if one must leave the phone to get information, referring to the client by name (title and last name, correctly pronounced), closing the conversation politely, and hanging up the phone gently.