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## BUSINESS

PRINT THIS STORY

Posted Sept. 27, 2005

# Minding your Ps and Qs from 9 to 5

### Employees reminded etiquette at work key

**By Kristin Stankewicz**  
*For The Post-Crescent*

The gum-smacker. The loud talker. The public groomer.

These are just a few of the office pariahs who annoy, gross out and alienate their co-workers. By forgetting simple manners and etiquette, these clueless souls submarine their own careers and make life difficult for those around them.

So how do you make sure you aren't unintentionally sabotaging yourself by failing to use proper etiquette at work?

"I call it using our Sunday manners," said Pam DeLeest, senior consultant with HS Group, a career management services firm in Grand Chute. "Respect is the biggest thing, and it's so underused in the workplace."

"People forget to treat others as they would want to be treated," said Julie Bertram, business development specialist with Manpower staffing services in Appleton.

If you're the one on the losing side of that equation, the results can be downright icky.

"I've had several office mates who saw no reason not to groom themselves at work," said Stacey Chambliss, a former

### What not to do at work

Here's a quick list of what you shouldn't do at work:

- Dress too casually.
- Talk loudly, swear or use vulgar language.
- Groom in public.
- Be messy. Clean up after yourself, replenish supplies and keep your work area neat.
- Sneak in late or out early. People do notice.
- Participate in office gossip. It's unprofessional and dangerous. Today, your co-worker is the hot topic; tomorrow, it could be you.
- Lose your temper or shout. Excuse yourself if you need to, until you regain control.
- Interrupt other people's conversations.
- Misuse office resources, including phone, internet, fax and office supplies.
- Forget basic courtesies. Be sure to say "please" and "thank you."

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Neenah engineer. "One person clipped his nails at his desk about twice a week. The clippings didn't always make it into the trash can. They were on the floor, flying onto nearby desks ... it was really gross."

It's not just outright disgusting habits that can leave a negative impression on co-workers. It can be simpler things, such as "when you assist a co-worker with a project and never hear a thank you or, worse yet, they take all the credit for your input," said Bertram.

Saying please and thank you are often-overlooked civilities, according to DeLeest. "We should make sure that when somebody assists us, we say thank you for the time and energy they put into that," she said.

Workers — or at least their employers — are showing an interest in learning more about business etiquette.

"Sales of etiquette books and courses are reported as being at an all-time high," said Diana L. Henke, professor of business and economics at the University of Wisconsin Fox Valley.

In an effort to improve the workplace manners of students who eventually will enter the workplace, UW-Fox Valley includes business etiquette information in its curriculum. The topic is covered in detail in two business courses, according to Henke. Plus, business course classrooms "are conducted in a business manner, and professional courtesy and behavior is stressed," she said.

When it comes to poor manners at work, two areas are especially error-prone — the phone and e-mail, DeLeest said.

On the phone, "you have to pay attention to how loud you're speaking, so it's not disruptive to others," she said. DeLeest also recommends keeping a mirror near your desk, to make sure you're smiling when you're on the phone.

"Sometimes we may come across as too aggressive or assertive. So look at yourself in that mirror, and make sure you see a smile. If you see a smile, they'll hear a smile," she said.

The informal nature of e-mail makes it a workplace etiquette minefield.

"Most people do not know how to convey the proper tone in the use of e-mail," said UW-Fox Valley's Henke, noting that what seems like a joke to one person can easily offend another.

"Another faux pas is when no grammar or punctuation is used," she said. "E-mail should not appear as your latest instant message response to a friend."

The trend toward workplace informality can cause confusion when it comes to appropriate workplace apparel as well.

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Henke said she recently talked to a medical professional “who commented to me that many young professionals do not know how to dress properly for the work environment. She complained that female students dress too provocatively,” she said.

“The message you want to send to others is that you’re competent,” DeLeest said. “The way you dress helps verify that. It’s one of those nonverbal messages you’re sending by the way you present yourself,” she said.

To make sure you’re acting appropriately, Manpower’s Bertram recommends taking the pulse of your workplace. “Observe the interaction between employees and the overall culture of the company.”

But as DeLeest points out, “That doesn’t mean if you see others acting poorly it gives you license to do the same thing. We’ve all been raised to use our manners and pay attention to our surroundings — do it.”

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