


# Business Etiquette

by Victoria L. Rayner

**M**ost people consider etiquette to be a system of petty rules and regulations regarding trivial matters of conduct and behavior. But in the world of business, etiquette goes much deeper than mere social conformity. It is necessary to establish professional rules and conventions or we risk breaking ties that can be difficult to establish. Good sense tells us that business etiquette is vital for promoting harmonious professional associations and goodwill within our industry. It does not take long before we discover the constant need for restraining our impulses and considering the rights of others in the business community. Without fundamental guidelines to follow, chaos, disharmony and misunderstanding are certain to occur. Business etiquette does not concern itself *only with the details of conduct.*





but also with the development of instinct for the value of harmony, organization and order. As part of, and yet apart from, customary manners, we find that there are more complex elements involved when we attempt to secure smooth communications and transactions in the professional world.

Social etiquette has always been patterned after the conditions of routine day to day living, whereas, business etiquette concerns itself with daily professional contact in a more carefully organized business environment. Its principles are designed to create a sense of ease of comfort for the career professional in a time of high pressure enterprise.

The value of etiquette in business **cannot** be over **emphasized**. Professional manners **will** help you gain a good reputation and the respect of others in the industry. As most of us are aware, one snippy letter, one rude response, or one thoughtless, **flippant** remark can destroy an association that has taken years to strengthen. In short, a tremendous amount of **irreversible** damage can be done **in** a matter of minutes. Studies indicate that polite career professionals whose **manners** are faultless, are better liked and more **importantly**, trusted by their business associates. No career, however noteworthy can compensate for the loss of good manners.

### Verbal conduct

Since so much of what we do **professionally** is based on our **communication** with others the **first and most important rule of business etiquette pertains to conversation and personal** expression. An honest but **unthinking** person, can often make the mistake of **speaking her/his** mind, before **contemplating** what affect those words might **have** on the **listener**. **Personal** opinions should **be** thought out **carefully** before they are voiced, or you risk **hurting** someone. The professional who habitually expresses her/his prejudices **about others** in the industry lowers her/his popularity with **every** negative **opinion** publicly **uttered**. **Moreover, ridicule invites the distrust of all those who hear it—the listener never can tell when she/he might be on the receiving** and of that **criticism**. A **well-mannered** professional never attacks the **character of another industry professional, mainly for fear of what it will cost her/him by doing so. In almost every incidence, it is best to keep one's prejudices to one's self.**

The same **rule** of conversational etiquette applies to **gossip—don't** listen to it, and don't repeat it. Perpetuating gossip in the esthetics industry is deadly. Words carelessly spoken always have a way of **returning** home to their source.

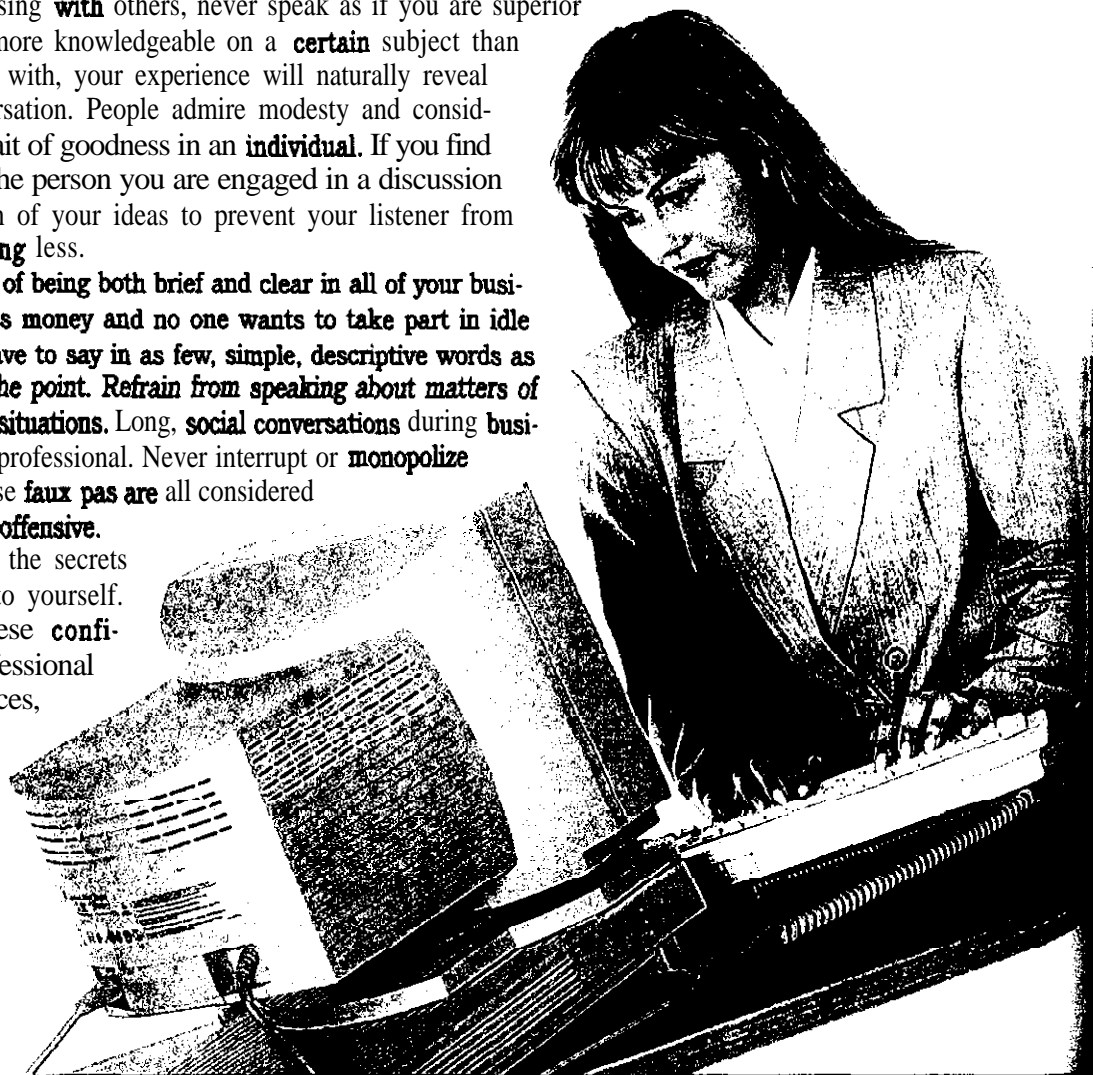
When it comes to conversing **with** others, never speak as if you are superior to your listener. If you are more knowledgeable on a **certain** subject than the person you are speaking with, your experience will naturally reveal itself in your general conversation. People admire modesty and consider it to **be** a fundamental trait of goodness in an **individual**. If you find that you know more than the person you are engaged in a discussion with, **simplify** the expression of your ideas to prevent your listener from feeling inadequate for **knowing** less.

**Recognize the importance of being both brief and clear in all of your business discussions. Time means money and no one wants to take part in idle chatter. Say only what you have to say in as few, simple, descriptive words as possible. Be concise and to the point. Refrain from speaking about matters of unimportance in professional situations. Long, social conversations during business hours are considered unprofessional. Never interrupt or monopolize a business conversation. These faux pas are all considered professionally intolerable and offensive.**

Make it a point to keep the secrets that others share with you to yourself. Regardless of whether these **confidences** are from close professional colleagues or acquaintances, you are obligated not to repeat them. To do so would be a breach of **professional** etiquette. No one in business trusts a person who divulges a confidence.

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Having e-mail is great, but only if you keep up with it. Be sure to check it regularly.



The value of suppressing one's negative emotions in business cannot be overstated. True professionals avoid all exhibitions of temper in the workplace.



## Acknowledge professional obligations

We all know the importance of **washing** our hands to maintain cleanliness, but it is also necessary to remember that one hand washes **the** other **in** the business world. When **starting** out, there is no better capital **than** a network of support. We gain what we **want** in business through the help of our professional contacts. Few things are more helpful than a positive push from someone in a position of power. If one is to become successful and remain successful, professional obligations to benefactors must **be** remembered and repaid. **To** feel oppressed by an obligation is to seem **ungrateful**. Always do your best to repay a professional courtesy. **Failure** to do so is bound to create enemies. A **career** debt that has been acknowledged **and** repaid will strengthen **your** credit **and** promote future support in your business endeavors.

## Conduct by telephone and e-mail

**Probably** the most common, discourteous habit today's business professionals possess, is the custom of ignoring business calls. To neglect **returning** a call is rude and unkind, because it clearly indicates that one does not consider the caller important. Do not let the pressure of professional demands or hurrying circumstances interfere with returning your business calls. Even the closest of associates will take offense to you not getting back to them right away.

Make it a point to respond as quickly as **possible** when summoned to the telephone. By promptly responding you will reduce the amount of time your caller must be placed on hold. It is **extremely irritating**, as most of us know, to be the person calling and to be told, "Just a minute, please," and then forgotten. Once someone has been placed on hold, **she/he** feels obligated to **wait** until a connection is made, even if the call is long **distance**.

**Well-mannered professionals** always identify themselves by **name** and title when answering the telephone. Always make an effort (even if you are pressed for **time**) to sound cheerful, relaxed and **friendly** when on the telephone. Remember your cares **and** anxieties about business are betrayed by the tone of your voice.

Messages left on **voice** mail machines or with receptionists should be short and specific. Always leave a **number** and the best time to contact you. It is considered rude to expect the person you **called to** look up your telephone number.

Also, remember the following key points

Always ask **permission** before putting someone on a speakerphone.

Having e-mail is great, but only if you keep up with it. Be sure to check it regularly

Respect other's **time**. Never call when you know they will **be** too busy to **speak with** you.

**When setting up a conference call, place one person in charge.**

## Control your emotions

In business there are often many stresses **and** irritations. Therefore, it is easy to understand how some people might break under the strain. There are times when it is tempting to lose control over our emotions and become impolite to those with whom we work daily. However, the value of suppressing one's negative emotions in business cannot be overstated.

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**True** professionals avoid all exhibitions of temper in the workplace.

Common courtesy is the best protection against the rudeness of other people in business. **Try** to make it a habit not to let things and people agitate you. **Learn** to be polite to others without being superficial, and firm without being completely unyielding. Never permit yourself to lose your temper or to show that you have taken offense to a supposed slight. Well-mannered professionals conduct themselves at all times and in **all** places with perfect control.

## The bottom line

Etiquette is **necessary** to the continual success of any career. Although most formality has vanished from American life, good manners remain. The ambitious professional who wishes to get ahead must understand the requirements of etiquette. Having good business manners **will** help you **gain a significant** advantage over your competitors and encourage people to do business with you. Nothing so betrays the quality of a person's background, education and **advantages** as behavior.

Although **there** are many rules of behavior, the most important **thing** to remember is to stop and think before you act. Nearly all mistakes pertaining to etiquette are caused by not thinking before taking action. Pause **and** consider what you hope to achieve with that remark or that gesture, and **then** proceed. ■



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