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Corporate Courtesy – Using Business Etiquette in a Professional Environment

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Honors Project

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Business Etiquette

George Bernard Shaw once said “There is no accomplishment so easy to acquire as politeness and none more profitable” (Moore, 1998, p. 5). In a recent U.S. News and World Report survey, 89 percent of the people interviewed said incivility and rudeness is a serious problem, and 78 percent agreed that it had gotten worse in the past 10 years; however, 99 percent of the respondents said their own behavior was civil (Johnson & Indvik, 2001). What defines civil behavior and etiquette, and should people be obligated to put it into action? C.S. Lewis (1980) says that there are two odd things about the human race: first, they were haunted by the idea of a sort of behavior they ought to practice, and second, they did not in fact do so (p. 16). Is etiquette important in the business world? Elizabeth Craig, author of *Don't Slurp Your Soup*, states, “Like it or not, good manners at the workplace are associated with competence in business. Likewise, sloppy manners are equated with lack of ability” (1996, p. 13). It is important in the corporate environment for professionals to be aware of business etiquette, as well as actively participate in the implementation and practice of it.

According to a research conducted by Schaffer, Kelley, and Goette (1993) posted in the *Journal of Education for Business*, 88% of senior-level managers have impeccable manners. The figure falls to 40% for middle-level and only 12% for recent MBA graduates. Education in business etiquette is essential, and most marketing professionals believe that etiquette should be included as part of a business school's curriculum. A three-page questionnaire was used to evaluate the perceptions of marketing professionals with respect to business etiquette. Included in the survey were open-ended questions that provided the respondents with the ability to list specific examples of good and poor

business etiquette and to describe any business etiquette training that had previously been received.

A total of 400 surveys were mailed to business professionals in the area of marketing throughout the United States, and these names and addresses of the participants were obtained via the selection of a systematic random sample from the 1992 American Marketing Association Director of Members. Out of the 400 surveys mailed, only 10 were returned as undeliverable; out of the 390 surveys delivered, 200 usable surveys were returned, resulting in a response rate of 51.3%. The respondents were then asked to rate the importance of etiquette in today's business world, with an answer of (1) being very important, and (5) not very important. A large majority (91.1%) of the respondents rated etiquette as either very important (56%) or important (35.1%). Less than 4% of the respondents indicated that business etiquette was somewhat unimportant (2.1%) or not very important (1.6%). These results show that even in the professional world of marketing and business, etiquette is still an important factor in the business person's daily work.

In spite of the fact that less than 25% of the respondents had previously received any business etiquette training, a large majority of all respondents felt that today's students of business should receive such training. Specifically, 79.9% of the respondents answered yes to the question, "Do you think business etiquette should be included as part of the business school's curriculum?" This particular study made by Schaffer, Kelley and Goette (1993) indicate that curriculum development in business etiquette may be fruitful, and as a result, a large majority of the participants in this study believe that business schools should include business etiquette in the curriculum.

Another study by Mausehund, Dortch, Brown, and Bridges (1995) found in the *Business Communication Quarterly* was completed to determine the current level of etiquette awareness possessed by students enrolled in business communication courses at three AACSB institutions. The findings indicate that students are most concerned with issues related to job interviews, interpersonal relationships, and social issues and least concerned with intercultural issues. A survey was given to and collected from 457 juniors, seniors, and graduate students enrolled in business communication classes in three AACSB-accredited colleges of business at the close of the 1994 spring term.

Analyses of data identified the social discomfort areas of students, and the major source of discomfort areas are job interviews, interpersonal relationships, and social issues. According to the data provided, 33% of those surveyed said that interviewing was their major concern, followed by 17% for both interpersonal relationships and social issues. According to Mausehund, Dortch, Brown, and Bridges (1995), they have concluded that even though students may not have a thorough grasp of etiquette in the workplace, they appear to have an interest in learning more about proper etiquette in the workplace. The two studies mentioned indicate that there is an increasing importance in knowing as well as teaching business etiquette to business professionals in training. Business etiquette and its implementation has become an issue in today's professional working world, and only by teaching it to students before they get out into the "real world" can they fully be confident in themselves as well as the job they are expected to perform.

Business etiquette is a set of rules that allow communication and interaction in a civilized manner. These arbitrary rules involve the rites and mores, forms and manners

that are required in a society or profession (Moore, 1998, p. 1). Another definition of business etiquette can be described as guidelines for conducting business with ease, style, and confidence (Casperson, 1999, p. 2). It is also the art of knowing how to behave in a given situation and knowing how to interact with people. Etiquette is the guideline for knowing how to behave appropriately in all situations (p.9). Being polite is sometimes not enough in the tough and competitive world of business. One must also be prepared to handle crisis situations, personality clashes, criticism, and the other problems that invariably arise when humans gather in one place to get work done. Survival and success in the business world require knowledge of how to deliver and how to receive both criticism and compliments (Mitchell, 2000, p. 14). With the increasing rudeness that society is integrating into their culture, it becomes important to define specific areas where business etiquette is most needed. Within the realm of business etiquette are the subject of first impressions, person-to-person introductions, table manners, and office etiquette.

It takes fifteen seconds to make a first impression, but it may take the rest of one's life to change a bad one (Moore, 1998, p. 28). Since body language and words both play a major role in how someone is perceived by others, there are four rules to remember that address the first impressions one makes on others. The first rule is to make the first ten words count. The most effective way to open any interaction is to send a "thanks" message. An example to this would be saying a small "thank-you for seeing me" statement that lets the other person know that he or she is appreciated. When possible, include the person's name in the first ten or twelve words of the conversation. This

allows the person greeted to enjoy a sense of recognition and starts off the meeting on a positive note (Sabath, 1993, pp. 13-14).

The second rule is to tune into others. The many ways in which one can relate to others is through his or her attitude. Attitude is evident in body language, how one completes tasks, attention to details, consideration of others, taking care of one's self, and a person's general approach to life. It begins on the inside and shows on the outside (Casperson, 1999, p.10). Barbara Pachter (2001), author of *When the Little Things Count*, gives these hints on how to successfully tune into others:

First, understand why you need to listen. The old adage that you were given two ears and one mouth for a reason is absolutely true. You want to listen more than you speak, and you cannot build and maintain genuine relationships unless you truly listen to others. People do not like it when others do not listen. Secondly, prepare yourself to listen. You need a non-distracting environment, so close the door and turn off any music. Pay attention to your internal distractions, for example, if you are hungry, then it is hard to listen. If you have to go to the bathroom, then it is hard to listen. Thirdly, pay attention to body language and give the person your undivided attention. Do not interrupt them, because not only is this rude, it shows you are not listening but planning what you are going to say next. Another rule is to concentrate. Try not to let your mind wander, even if the person is boring. Do not pre-judge someone and do not make assumptions about someone's ability to discuss a topic before you've had the discussion. Lastly, acknowledge that you are listening. You can do this by verbally saying, "Oh," or "I see." (p. 15-17)

An individual's handshake also speaks loudly about one's professionalism, credibility, and confidence. A firm handshake conveys confidence, assurance, interest, and respect. It also conveys "I am interested in you and confident in my business skills." A limp handshake can send the opposite message and is interpreted as "I'm unsure of myself and I'm uncomfortable being here and meeting you" (11). The way to tune into others is to make eye contact and smile. It shows one's attentiveness and is essential when making contact with someone. A person's expression demonstrates the confidence one has, and the more secure one is, the more positive the interaction becomes.

Thirdly, walk with a purpose. Whether one is walking into an office building or on his or her way to meet clients, putting bounce into one's step is vital. Usually others enjoy being around high-energy people, and this will set a positive atmosphere with the person being greeted (Sabath, 1993, p. 14). Body language is a form of nonverbal communication by which gestures, expressions, and body position and movement convey unspoken messages. One needs to be aware of the messages that his or her body language is sending. It might be easy to glance over, but such small things as a yawn, a glance at the clock or fidgeting with a pen says more than the action itself (Casperson, 1999, p. 22).

Finally, be impeccably groomed. A person's clothing, accessories, and grooming are the first things people notice. New acquaintances judge one's confidence and competence by his or her appearance (Moore, 1998, p. 31). A few basic details to this rule include: keeping hair neat and in a fashion that flatters the shape of the face, remembering that the kind of jewelry worn is often perceived as a reflection of the kind of person one is, and maintaining one's shoes so that they look like new (Sabath, 1993, p. 14). In order to look one's best consistently, however, one should practice good grooming

habits everyday. This includes, but is not limited to: bathing everyday, controlling body odor, maintaining clean, healthy, and attractive hair, and having clean and manicured hands and nails. It becomes significantly easier to make a long-lasting, good impression on someone when these conditions are met.

A person's attire is always going to be important in the business environment. Many employees are understandably dazed and confused as to what is appropriate and what is not (Moore, 1998, p. 82). People believe that they have a right to wear whatever they please, but the reality is that at work other people have to look at them and customers must transact business with them. Customers can take their business elsewhere, but coworkers can not simply walk away. Attire should be a matter of common courtesy and respect for the sensibilities of others. "The key is to present no visual surprises" (p. 83). The way that individuals dress is not only the determining factor in the image they present, but dressing inappropriately or in a nonprofessional way usually does not leave an impression of success, competency, or trustworthiness. It may affect salaries or the move up the corporate ladder. The critical point that one should remember is that image is very important (p. 84).

Dressing casual is slowly becoming integrated into the working environment; however, according to Moore (1998), "Though casual dress is now being assimilated into America's workforce, corporate casual has not yet been fully accepted" (p. 84). Workers anchored to their computers, eating lunch beside the PC mouse, do not always need to wear the traditional suit, and much of this trend shows that corporate America is slowly peeling off the dark business suit, kicking off the high heels, and going casual. About 85 million of the 118 million employees in the country are dressing down for work.

Unfortunately, casual dressing does not work in some positions, and not all casual wear is created equal. For example, people in lending institutions, banks, and other areas of finance require a more disciplined look. Clients would not want to entrust their life savings, legal matters, and business affairs to people who appear sloppy or too relaxed. The correct business look, however, is not just for those who make big decisions and earn big pay checks. Personnel directors often base their first impression of applicants on clothing, grooming, accessories, even when the job description does not require a suit and tie. The businessman who chooses a well-fitted suit and a conservative, silk tie is saying, "I'm here to do business in a cooperative and competent manner – whatever it takes."

Another thing is that people usually feel they perform best when dressed up. The good news about business attire is that the standard outfit in the business community does not change much. The business image must fit the job description so a crucial component in forming that perception is the way we dress for work – our professional attire (p. 85-86).

Many corporations have adopted dress codes or have amended policies to deal with the casual business issue. The code varies from company to company, but employees need to know what is expected (p. 99). Craig (1996) stresses this importance by stating, "How you dress in the corporate world is very important, because it makes a statement about you and affects everyone you meet. Dressing inappropriately for your position can prevent you from getting the promotion you deserve, though you'll probably never know that this was the real reason. It's hard to be the president of the company or even a representative of it if you wear out-of-date suits and ties that clash" (p. 31). Every company has an unwritten dress code. Sometimes companies located downtown have a

more formal dress code than those in the suburbs; however, one should dress to the standards of the particular business he is in (p. 31-32).

What about business attire after business hours, such as receptions and dinners? Business may not always be serious work, but business is always serious. Office parties in the office or in a restaurant or hotel require business attire. The office party may appear to be entirely social, but what people wear should be in good taste to show how serious they are about their career (Moore, 1998, p. 97). Usually the invitation to a special business occasion indicates the appropriate dress required. Whether the event is a cocktail party or a barbecue, held at a home, restaurant, or at a country club, guests are expected to wear the appropriate attire. If the invitation does not say, then one can ask if the event is formal or informal when he is responding. When a couple gets an invitation, they should make sure to coordinate their clothing so that they do not appear as the odd couple. One should not be wearing sparkles while the other is in casual Friday attire. A professional image is always important even when the occasion is a nonbusiness function. When a couple's clothing is not coordinated, they give the impression that they have not communicated (Casperson, 1999, p. 34-35).

At an evening event when the invitation says, "Business Dress," that means the men are to wear a dark blue or black business suit, a white shirt, and a silk tie. The women are to wear a business suite and blouse with low to mid-heel pumps or a tailored dress (never frilly, lacy, or revealing). A dress with a jacket is often a better choice than the dress alone, and the jacket remains on throughout the evening (Moore, 1998, p. 97). Semiformal events call for attire that is dressier than business but not as formal as a tuxedo. Semiformal or informal dress calls for dressy, shiny fabrics with some sparkle. If

a lady's dress has small or no straps, a woman should wear a shoulder wrap, at least during dinner or whenever she is sitting down. From across the dining table, often all that one can see is bare shoulders; this is not the impression one should leave. She should be mindful of where most her evening will be spent: at a dining table, sitting at a concert, or standing at a reception, and should use this information to plan what she will wear (Casperson, 1999, p. 39-40).

Formal wear is worn in the evening, and may be required for a ceremony, an awards banquet, a holiday party, or an evening at the theater, all of which may be business related (Moore, 1998, p. 97). For men, "black tie" means patent shoes, a black tuxedo, and a black, hand-tied bow tie with a white, starched, studded shirt. A tail coat is short to the waist in front with long tails in the back and is required for only the most formal occasions. Few business-related events require such formality. Businessmen should never wear loud, decorative ties, cummerbunds, or ruffled shirts for any formal occasion. High school prom goers often wear them, but they are not the best choice, even for young men. For women, "black tie" means a soft dress with sleeves and a long, narrow skirt. Understated elegance is always best. Wearing short or mid-calf dresses (sometimes called cocktail dresses) to black-tie events is popular in some areas, but where tradition is respected, a long dress should be worn. "White tie" for women, means her most formal attire. She should wear an elegant gown with some shoulder treatment; however, a strapless gown should not be worn (p. 98-99). White tie is worn by the bridal party for formal weddings after 6:00 in the evening, for inaugural balls, debutante balls, and fund-raiser galas. Women usually wear a floor length dress or flowing chiffon pants. The hem length is longer than for black tie events, and it is an event where a woman can

really dress up with glamorous jewelry, fancy hairstyles and ornaments, and special shoe ornaments (Casperson, 1999, p. 41-42).

Another aspect of business etiquette that is important is person-to-person introductions. Casperson (1999) says "There is an art to introductions" (p. 13). Introductions serve many purposes in business, from acquainting individuals with one another, or serving as an opener for conversation when approaching a new acquaintance. There are two common introductions used everyday: the introduction of two or more people to one another, and the introduction of one's self, the self-introduction (p. 13). The most important rule in making introductions is: *make them* – even if the formal rules or even names cannot be remembered (Moore, 1998, p. 105). When introductions are not made, both strangers will be distracted from the content of the conversation as they try to determine who the other person is or wait for a break in the discussion to introduce themselves. As soon as introductions are made, everyone feels more comfortable. The person making the introduction appears well-mannered and considerate, and the process creates rapport and establishes some openings for conversation (Pachter, 1995, p. 9).

To make an introduction properly takes practice, keen observation, and some sense of age and seniority. It is also important to understand who is being introduced to whom. The purpose of an introduction is to give people an opportunity to get to know one another. In the business world, defer to office seniority and age and remember that gender is not a factor (Casperson, 1999, 14). A properly performed introduction does more than make the person being introduced feel flattered and the new acquaintance feel included. Introductions can be a subtle acknowledgement of someone's professional status of rank. It will reflect favorably for the person performing the introductions when

he shows that he is aware of the protocol and acts in a manner consistent with it (Pachter, 1995, p. 9). When introducing people, one is casting them in a temporary role, and protocol requires that the conversation continue, at least briefly, in the same direction. The introductory information provided also says something about the introducer. It indicates what he considers to be significant or interesting about the person being introduced (p. 11).

The person in the higher ranking position is mentioned first. Clients, senior executives, or distinguished guests can be considered authority figures, or persons of importance. Craig (1996) gives a few rules to follow concerning introductions: a younger person is typically introduced to an older person, a nonofficial or nondignitary is typically presented to an official or dignitary, a peer within the company is introduced to a peer from another company, and an executive is introduced to a customer or client. One should always introduce his or her spouse to the boss, junior executives are presented to senior executives, and all guests, unless they are dignitaries or elderly, are introduced to the guest of honor (pp. 60-61).

Making the effort to remember people's names and to pronounce them correctly has many rewards. Clients will perceive the introducer as someone who cares not just about the business, but also about the people involved. Personal relationships strengthen business relationships (Casperson, 1999, p. 17). Unfortunately, human tendency is to forget, and therefore people will forget names of others. What is supposed to be done if this happens? This is a common problem, and should not be worried about; however, one can exercise certain activities to help avoid forgetting names. When the name is spoken, the individual should concentrate on the person and the name he wants to remember, not

on himself and his fear. He should use the new acquaintance's name often in conversation to retain it in his mental computer. If that does not work, he can visually write the name on the person's forehead, and finally, associate the name with something about the person's appearance (Moore, 1998, p.110). Hopefully doing these few things will help one's memory when trying to recall names.

If this fails, however, it is not a big deal. It is possible for someone to overcome this awkwardness by remaining calm and just admitting that he or she cannot remember the name by saying something like, "I know we have met, but I simply cannot recall your name," or "Today I can't seem to remember my own name," or "I'm having trouble remembering names today. Help me out" (pp. 100-111). In the professional world this is a common, but forgivable, mistake and can be easily forgotten. Besides, it is better for one to admit he forgot the name than to not make the introduction (Pachter, 2001, p. 12).

Sometimes people end up in a different situation where they have to introduce themselves. This is also an opportunity to meet others and share their information. A self-introduction always includes one's full name and what he does, and should only be from fifteen to thirty seconds long. A brief, finely tuned introduction is especially useful when networking or when beginning a conversation with a new acquaintance. The self-introduction is a window of information that may serve to draw others into conversation, and it gives people the opportunity to promote themselves, what they do, and their company (Casperson, 1999, pp. 20-21). A common mistake is an introduction that lasts too long. An individual should provide just enough information to get the conversation started. One or two sentences usually are enough, and they can always provide additional information later (Pachter, 1995, p. 12).

A study conducted by Shirley Lazorchak, Ph. D (2000) and Certified Business Etiquette and Protocol Consultant, found in the *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences*, showed that business etiquette dining knowledge served as a measure of student knowledge of domestic dining etiquette, and support exists for the use of a tutorial that can increase students' business dining savvy. Nineteen family and consumer sciences students volunteered for the study, which consisted of a 67 question multiple-choice test targeting ten subscales of dining knowledge: placement of napkins, duties of the host and guest, eating of breads and rolls, rules of beverages, proper place settings, server code, American and European styles of dining, passing of community foods, and general dining etiquette. This test was given to them before and after they received a "business dining tutorial".

The group scored significantly higher on the posttest in contrast to the pretest on the business etiquette dining knowledge measure. Significant improvement in scores occurred for the group from pretest to posttest on all subscales. Not only did the tutorial improve their knowledge and practice of business dining, students expressed anecdotal comments afterwards which indicated interest in learning more about international dining etiquette while recognizing its importance in enhancing business relationships. This only shows that even the small practices of business dining are still a significant importance in the world of a business professional.

Many times important business transactions occur over a meal, therefore business etiquette is also another key factor with corporate dining. Craig (1996) comments, "One downfall of many executives is table manners. Your lunch or dinner host or guest is likely to notice that you put too much food into your mouth, that you talked with your

mouth full, or that you didn't use the silverware for the food it was intended to be used for" (p. 87). There are several "commandments" for dining that we should consider.

The first rule is to realize the purpose for business dining. The main purpose of a business meal is to build rapport, and eating is only secondary. One dines in order to conduct business and establish relationships. Even though he may need to eat, he should remember that he is not there for the food (Pachter, 2001, 89). If, for example, one person ordered but to his disappointment did not receive what he expected, it is not appropriate for him to send back his food if he is the only one. This will cause the others at the business table to feel obligated to wait for him, and that would be disrupting the momentum of the meal. The only time it is acceptable to return food to the kitchen is when a few people find it necessary to send their meals back (Sabath, 1993, p. 109).

A second commandment is to be discreet with undesirable food and foreign substances. When in the company of others, it is not appropriate to make a piece of hair in your food the center of conversation. Rather, eat something else until the server returns to your table, then, in a low voice, request that your meal be replaced. Most servers will pick up on your cue immediately (p. 109). Do not make a scene or yell at the server (Craig, 1996, p. 89), this will only show your lack of knowledge and experience in dealing with situations in a tactful and professional manner.

During the first course or two, it is appropriate to talk about light business: how things are going at the office, how the job is going, and business outreach in the community. All of the conversations should eventually lead to the reason why the business meal was called. Being informed about a company gives topics of conversation and insight as to the direction of the business. Conversation topics during the early part of

the meal might include vacation activities, sports, personal interests, or even children (when appropriate). Serious business talk is saved for later in the meal after the entrée plates have been removed. By talking about other subjects, you avoid the problems of balancing form in hand, food in mouth, and most of all, important conversation. Clearly put by Casperson (1999), "Serious business conversation takes concentration" (p. 52).

There are several specific behaviors that should be avoided at the business dining table: getting too personal in conversation, complaining about business colleagues, finishing other's sentences, interrupting the conversation, using profanity or telling inappropriate jokes, starting the business conversation before the conclusion of the entrée, putting business papers on the table before business discussion begins, wearing inappropriate clothing, coughing without covering your mouth, burping, yawning, and getting out a mirror at the table (pp. 56-57). It is important to refrain from doing these actions because it shows the others at the table your professionalism and acknowledgement of rudimentary table manners.

Another basic thing to consider when dining is the use of the napkin. When the napkin is displayed in a goblet, it is usually best to wait for the server to present it to you. This is frequently the protocol in French restaurants. When you do place your napkin, all it takes is a simple gesture. As Sabath (1993) puts it, "Don't come off as some kind of magician, shaking it over the table as if you're trying to make a rabbit appear." Simply open it as you place it on your lap. When the meal is finished, make sure the napkin stays on your lap until everyone at the table has finished eating and drinking. At that point, napkins should be placed to the right of the place setting (95).

It is important for people to know which bread plate or water glass is theirs.

Pachter (2001) leaves a trick to remember which plate and glass is which: “food” has four letters and “left” has four letters. Bread is food, so your bread plate is on the left. “Drink has five letters and so does “right.” Your water glass is on the right (p. 90). There are also different types of utensils. The largest fork is generally the entrée fork and the salad fork is smaller. The largest spoon is usually the soup spoon. As a general rule of thumb, the place settings should be navigated from outside in (p.91). Either the American or Continental style for handling utensils is acceptable in the United States. The American way is to hold the knife in the right hand and fork in the left, tines down. One can cut up to three pieces of meat. Then, the knife is placed down on the plate and the fork is switched to the right hand, tines up. The Continental style for handling utensils is the same starting and cutting procedure as American, except the fork is not switched to the other hand. The fork goes to the mouth tines down and the knife remains in the right hand, which can be used to put food onto the back of the fork. When the meal is finished, the utensils are placed in the finished position. If the dinner plate is a clock, the fork and knife are placed in parallel lines at approximately ten and four o’clock. The knife should be on top, and the handles towards the four (p. 92).

As a guest of a business dinner arrangement, the guest is expected to arrive on time, dressed appropriately, and prepared to discuss the agenda topics. It is also expected for the guest to practice good table manners. It is always proper to wait for the host to signal when to begin eating by lifting his or her utensil. When somebody eats, he should remember to swallow before speaking and chew with his lips closed. He should sit

straight and keep his elbows off the table, and also remember: "Elbows never, forearms sometimes, wrists always" (Casperson, 1999, pp. 55-56).

When sitting at a business meal, the individual should concentrate on the people he is dining with and the business he wishes to conduct. Turning off the cell phone sends a message to the host or to the guests that they and their time are important and that they are respected. Remembering and practicing these small items of etiquette reflect to others how much they mean to an individual.

While much has been written about violence in the workplace, it is often the small and subtle egregious acts, the little incivilities, which take the largest toll. A recent study on workplace incivility reveals that rude employees and managers can cost a company millions of dollars a year. As the workplace becomes more diverse, the potential for misunderstanding or unintended offenses may multiply. When stress is prevalent, rudeness and incivility become the norm (Johnson & Indvik, 2001). Craig (1996) gives a few pointers in how to reduce the "incivilities" of the office:

Addressing your supervisor or client by the first name without having permission to do so does not show your business sense. Unless told otherwise, address these people by their formal title. Be sure to return RSVPs promptly. The two most important phrases you'll ever use in business are "Thank you" and "I apologize." They say more about your manners and professionalism than you may realize. It's not always enough just to say them. Sometimes handwritten notes are appropriate. Show compassion and concern for a colleague or associate who has lost a loved one by sending a note of condolence. If you must keep someone who has arrived on time for his appointment waiting, be sure to acknowledge his presence by

greeting him, then apologizing for and explaining the delay. If you can't greet him personally, have your secretary explain to him that you know he is there and that you will be with him shortly. (p. 25)

By practicing these few common courtesies in the office, the company environment can change drastically, from a stressful, negative atmosphere, to a positive and pleasant one.

In a survey conducted by Robert Half International, fifty percent of residents cited "criticizing an employee in front of others" as one of the most serious sins one could commit in a work environment. Sabath (1993) emphasizes that we must "never criticize an employee in front of others, always give employees the opportunity to express themselves, and never be late for an appointment" (p. 34). The Economic Press states, "A good supervisor is someone who can step on your toes without messing up your shine" and "A good boss is someone who takes a little more than his share of the blame and a little less than his share of the credit" (Casperson, 1999, p. 69). Pachter (1995) agrees with the need for courtesy and respect in the office environment:

You didn't choose your co-workers, and, with the possible exceptions of your boss and/or the personnel department, they didn't choose you. Yet, somehow, despite possible clashes in personalities and in working styles, you must all manage to get along for the major part of your day. Deadlines and work pressures can make people irritable, but they are no excuse for poor manners. The need to respect a person's territory and privacy does not diminish in corporate climate. Thinking of others and their needs enhances the work flow and your work relationships, making everyone more productive and content. Manners can make the difference between a cooperative and a combative office environment (p. 66).

It takes everyone in the office working together to meet the increasing demands on workers today. Peggy Post (1999), author of *The Etiquette Advantage in Business*, comments on office courtesy: “You and your coworkers are in the same soup, and whether you sink or swim has a great deal to do with your ability to treat your workmates – even the difficult ones – with courtesy and respect. From a strictly self-serving perspective, it pays to have allies rather than enemies and to assume that everyone you work with can give you a boost up the corporate ladder. Even if you don’t consider yourself a ‘people person’ you can win friends and gain influence by observing the common courtesies and being tolerant when others do not. Work to appreciate and recognize that you are all part of a larger company culture with its own rules, standards, and eccentricities” (p. 51-52).

Not only is this a challenge to employees, but it also takes a little extra effort to manage the office. Much of one’s success emanates from how well a boss treats his staff, peers, and supervisors. A truly successful manager has these qualities: cheerfully greets with a smile all employees (regardless of their job status), calls people properly by name, never considers himself or herself “above” doing menial tasks or helping someone and delegates, but does not dump his or her tasks on others. Additional characteristics of a good boss are he privately and constructively critiques an employee who has made an error, displays an appropriate sense of humor in the proper circumstances, is always willing to take responsibility for errors (never placing the blame on others), and is not self-absorbed but interested in others (Moore, 1998, pp. 73-74). Not surprisingly, bad managers tend to infect their departments with bad attitudes. It is like a disease: they spread despair, anger, and depression, which show up in lack of work, absenteeism, and

turnover. Targets of poor behavior characterized their bosses as generally rude to peers, not respectful of subordinates, hard to get along with, emotionally unresponsive to problems, and temperamental (Johnson & Indvik, 2001).

What happens when there is conflict? Conflict can occur whenever two people do not agree on how to handle a situation. Given all the varied personalities, differing backgrounds and wide-ranging viewpoints at work, the surprise is not that there is so much conflict but there is not even more! However, disagreement does not have to escalate into bullying, back-stabbing, and bickering. When the argument is examined as a professional dispute, rather than categorized as a personal attack, employees stand a better chance of working out their differences. However, because the human tendency is to be emotionally invested in work, it is difficult to put feelings aside when proposals are rejected or ideas are turned over (Pachter, 1995, p. 88). The true test of one's etiquette skills comes not from dealing with people who are polite but from dealing with those who are rude. This is called the courtesy challenge. "If someone calls you a name and embarrasses you in front of your colleagues, it's tempting, easy (and wrong) to reciprocate the rude behavior. When someone criticized you unfairly, it tests your self-control and your knowledge of proper conduct to be graciously self-assertive in your response. The ability to react courteously when others treat you impolitely is a sign of strength. It's also a learned behavior, and improves with practice" (p. 87).

There are a few steps to take when conflict occurs. The first step is to define the conflict. This is a mental step people need to take before discussing the situation with anyone else. To keep a clear mind, deep breaths will help. The individual should be specific in determining what the disagreement is about, as well as should be able to

describe the specific behavior that causes conflict. After this, other alternatives should be considered. People only have so much time and energy to spend on disputes and since most people want to be considered a reasonable, they should choose their fights wisely. The individual involved should be approached first. The person who is causing the difficulty should be given a chance to correct it or explain it. The sooner this is done, the better. Many people avoid this step out of fear or reluctance, going directly to the boss to solve the problem. Most of the time the boss expects situations like small conflicts to be resolved by the parties involved, and wants nothing to do with it. Accepting responsibility for dealing with issues that affect you is part of being a professional (p. 88).

When the “bothersome” individual is approached, the issues of conflict should be dealt with separately. People will tune out if the conflict is defined in too broad terms. A mutual solution should be developed, and the areas of agreement should be pointed out. A solution should be proposed first by the complainer, and then he should give the other person a chance to input his suggestions. Each person should indicate which solutions he would consider appropriate, and should also discuss each one and pick the one that the both of them can live with. The solution should be stated in a specific way and should also be followed through, because there is a possibility that each will have to remind the other of the agreement. Some may even find it necessary to renegotiate, as well as follow up in writing (p. 89). Rising above impolite conduct has multiple advantages. Pachter (1995) praises those who overcome incivility: “You will be perceived as a person of high standards, someone who doesn’t ‘stoop’ to a discourteous level even when under fire. Your actions may raise the consciousness of others, who might even follow your

example. But most important, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that, whatever the circumstances have been, you behaved appropriately and courteously – an accomplishment worth celebrating” (p. 99).

People do business with those they know, like, and trust. Prospective clients need to know that they are cared for by a company in order to feel comfortable doing business with them, and that no matter what their problems are, the company will be willing to help solve them. No matter what type of business one is in, proper business etiquette is not optional; it is something that should be used every day. In fact, using proper business etiquette will help individuals appear polished and professional, causing clients to view them as knowledgeable and confident (Casperson, 2000). However, being polite is sometimes not enough in the tough and competitive world of business. One must also be prepared to handle crisis situations, personality clashes, criticism, and the other problems that invariably arise when humans gather in one place to get work done. Survival and success in the business world require a knowledge of how to deliver and how to receive both criticism and compliments (Mitchell, 2000, p.14).

To reduce the rudeness and incivility in the workplace, companies should implement “corporate etiquette” policies. Etiquette, in its simplest form, is being polite. This is an attribute that sometimes escapes those in today’s fast-paced society. It is the poise and polish we exhibit, and sometimes do not, in our daily interactions with people. Practicing good etiquette proves we appreciate and respect the rights of others, and doing so gives us the ability to put people at ease, making them feel that they are the center of our attention, if even for a moment (Johnson & Indvik, 2001). By practicing business

etiquette on a daily basis, one can develop a leadership style that money and prestige can never buy. As a result, one's business career can soar to places beyond the imagination.

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333.

SOUTHERN SCHOLARS SENIOR PROJECT

Name: Shayna Sanchez Date: 5-13-02 Major: Business

SENIOR PROJECT

A significant scholarly project, involving research, writing, or special performance, appropriate to the major in question, is ordinarily completed the senior year. The project is expected to be of sufficiently high quality to warrant a grade of A and to justify public presentation.

Under the guidance of a faculty advisor, the Senior Project should be an original work, should use primary sources when applicable, should have a table of contents and works cited page, should give convincing evidence to support a strong thesis, and should use the methods and writing style appropriate to the discipline.

The completed project, to be turned in in duplicate, must be approved by the Honors Committee in consultation with the student's supervising professor three weeks prior to graduation. Please include the advisor's name on the title page. The 2-3 hours of credit for this project is done as directed study or in a research class.

Keeping in mind the above senior project description, please describe in as much detail as you can the project you will undertake. You may attach a separate sheet if you wish:

This revised paper does provide a stronger research base for the topic

Signature of faculty advisor Herbert E. Coody for Peggy Elkin Expected date of completion _____

Approval to be signed by faculty advisor when completed:

This project has been completed as planned:

This in an "A" project:

This project is worth 2-3 hours of credit:

Advisor's Final Signature Herbert E. Coody for Peggy Elkin

Chair, Honors Committee _____ Date Approved: May 2002

Dear Advisor, please write your final evaluation on the project on the reverse side of this page. Comment on the characteristics that make this "A" quality work.