

Does Communication Etiquette and Professionalism still count?

Workplace etiquette has been under the microscope for years. As the common practice of business formal for professionals began giving out to a more informal dress for success, so too did personal and professional etiquette begin to become more informal. Greetings to management and business owners moved from the very formal greetings of Mr./Mrs. to simply Fred or Jane. And, it didn't stop there. Today, it's quite common to see even more casual clothing at work. On the other hand, it seems that communication etiquette and the need for professionalism has stayed remarkably the same.

However, with the rapid growth of work at home employees and videoconferencing, a focus on communication etiquette and professionalism is more important than ever. That's because it's just too easy to slip into a casual form of etiquette when you're working from a relaxed home environment. But let's face it, would you dare to show up at work in your pajamas or with your hair uncombed? Would you talk over a colleague during a discussion and/or interrupt the proceedings because you were late for a meeting?

Be advised that even though teleconferencing gives us another tool and may change our work environment, communication etiquette and professionalism are still important. Pay attention to the following tips as they will help to ensure your continued career success.

Dress for success – in spite of the fact you may well dress quite casual when working at home, meeting with clients, a senior manager and/or an executive team, still requires dressing for the opportunity. Think about what others will wear and try to mirror this so that viewers will focus on what you say and not what you are wearing.

Be armed and ready – be early for the meeting so that you have a few minutes to assure you are ready. Test your equipment ahead of time and be sure that everyone can hear you and see you. Review the meeting agenda, determine where best to provide your input and be ready with any documents you will need. Leaving the meeting to find a document is disruptive. Where possible, be aware of all the meeting participants so that long introductions are unnecessary.

Location, location – keep in mind that your meeting participants will also be viewing your personal environment so be careful to think about whether or not those pictures on the wall are appropriate for a larger audience. Straighten up your desk and bookcase area. Lighting is also important for videoconference. Be sure to keep the light in front of you so that meeting participants can see you clearly. At the same time, if you choose to add a virtual background during your meeting, make sure it is professional.

Avoid distractions – while you and other participants might enjoy soft music in the background as you join in a meeting, this will only be a distraction for your meeting participants. Remember, sound carries! With this in mind, also ensure you are isolated from the pet dog or cat as well as interruptions from family members. On the other hand, if you are indeed interrupted, be sure to

be polite because everyone is listening. Then again, once the meeting has started, avoid getting up and wandering around. Meeting participants aren't interested in a home tour.

Smile for the camera – keep your camera on during the meeting. Lurking in the background simply announces you aren't fully participating. At the same time, set your camera at eye level so that you aren't always looking down. Eyes down inhibits the essence of video participation. Although it might feel awkward, avoid directing your eyes at the camera so that you appear to be speaking directly to the individual. Finally, keep in mind that you are indeed on “candid camera” and that everyone can see you playing with your hair or blowing your nose!

Galley view – it is always wise to use the galley view of participants so that you can see people's reactions to what is being said. This gives you clues with respect to asking further questions and/or the need for follow-up.

Manage your meeting – mute your microphone when you listening to a speaker. Avoid interrupting and instead use the raise your hand function. Use the chat feature to send a question. Use a “thumbs-up or thumbs-down” to signal your point of view.

Stay focused – avoid sending private messages during the meeting. Not only are you not focused on the agenda but your messages may well be downloaded and viewed by all attendees when minutes of the meeting are distributed. Stay focused instead of jumping back and forth to your email messages or other notifications that arrive during your meeting session. Multi-tasking during a video meeting takes your attention away from the task at hand.

Be inclusive – remember that old saying, “out of sight out of mind?” Yes, that can happen on a video call as well. Be conscious of the fact that some geographic areas do not have good video connections thus requiring some participants to call in by telephone. Jot their name down and refer to them every once in a while.

Eat, drink and be merry? – while workplace meetings often came with food service, eating and drinking during a video meeting doesn't work the same. After all, who wants to listen to someone chewing and/or gulping and slurping their drink? Tea or coffee maybe acceptable but ask your participants first.

Work and fun – by now everyone has heard of “zoom fatigue”, a sense of exhaustion that befalls employees who are on video conferencing for much of the day. If your meeting is going to be long, plan for a series of breaks. Take the time to catch up on some personal discussion and drink that cup of tea. This is especially important if teambuilding is part of the equation.

Are you the host? – if you are tapped to be the host, be sure to circulate an agenda inclusive of meeting times so that participants can prepare. Circulate a brief bio on new participants so that valuable time is not spent on lengthy introductions and the meeting stays focused. Keep the meeting flowing by directing questions to specific people and asking for further input through the chat feature. Close the meeting on time.

Don't forget goodbye – you wouldn't just walk out of an in-person meeting so why would you leave a video meeting without saying goodbye? It's only polite to let participants know that you need to exit. This can be done by raising your hand, using the chat format.

Live video conferencing is here to stay. This means everyone needs to become more familiar with the technical aspects of these meetings while at the same time continuing to pay attention to communication etiquette and professionalism. These two meeting elements are not simply a courtesy, they can make or break a career and/or at the very least create unnecessary embarrassment.

Source: Video Conferencing Etiquette, 10 Tips for a successful videoconferencing/Meredith Hart | March 25, 2020; Don't Lurk, don't eat, please mute: the new etiquette and rules of zoom.

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