

# The Workplace

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## A Fact Sheet

### Highlights

Ways to avoid common mistakes in business etiquette:

1. Remember the work environment is gender neutral.
2. Save time by a) typing personal congratulatory and thank you notes, b) ending lengthy telephone calls even if you did not initiate the call, and c) allowing the caller to call you back when disconnected.
3. Business meals are for eating and networking.
4. Adhere to the protocol in your office when addressing superiors.
5. On casual dress days wear business casual clothes.

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## Common Mistakes Made in Business Etiquette

Business etiquette, another term for good manners, are the guidelines for how to act in a business or work situation. Business etiquette is based on position and practicality instead of gender and chivalry, the basis of social etiquette. Keeping in mind that the work environment is gender neutral and is no place for old-fashioned gallantry, many simply do not know what to do in business settings. To further complicate the issue, most work environments today consist of individuals ranging in age from their late teens through their sixties or perhaps their seventies and who are from all parts of the United States and from abroad. With individuals working together from several generations and varying cultures, it is not surprising that workers are often confused about how they should act and consequently feel awkward.

This issue of *The Workplace* is devoted to some of the more common mistakes made in business etiquette today. Etiquette that is appropriate for a work environment is often almost opposite that of social etiquette. Most of the more common errors in workplace etiquette can easily be avoided by following these guidelines:

1. Remember the work environment is gender neutral.
2. Save time by:
  - a) typing personal congratulatory and thank you notes,
  - b) ending lengthy telephone calls even if you did not initiate the call, and
  - c) allowing the caller to call you back when disconnected.
3. Business meals are for eating and networking.
4. Adhere to the protocol in *your* office when addressing superiors.
5. On casual dress days wear business casual clothes.

**Table 1. Common Mistakes in Business Etiquette and Solutions for How to Avoid Them**

| Common Mistakes  | Solutions  |
|--|--|
| Men rushing to open the door or pull out a chair for a female co-worker/women waiting for a male co-worker to open the door or pull out a chair. | If any co-worker—male or female—needs help to open a door or to pull out a chair for any reason, then offer to do so for him or her.   |
| Men waiting for women to exit an elevator first.   | Whoever—whether male or female—is standing in the front of the elevator when the door opens should exit first.   |
| Waiting for the person who called to end the conversation first.   | After the purpose of the call has been fulfilled, either party may courteously terminate the phone call.   |
| Tracking down a caller when the line was disconnected during a call.   | Whoever placed the call initially has the responsibility for calling the other party back.   |
| Hand writing all personal notes.   | Any personal note, i.e., congratulations and thank you notes, with the exception of condolences, may be typewritten.   |
| Shaking hands across your desk; remaining seated because you are a woman when someone comes in for an appointment.                               | When someone enters your office for an official visit, both male and female should stand up, step from behind the desk, and offer his/her hand for a handshake. Then, offer the other person a seat. If the visit is a first, it is best to take a seat in close proximity to the guest, rather than conducting business across a desk.  |
| Deferring to age and/or gender when making introductions.  | Rank and position take precedent over age or gender when introducing one person to another.  |
| Exchanging business cards during lunches and dinners.  | Unless the meal is considered a working lunch/dinner in advance, i.e., you work on, review, discuss business documents, take notes, etc. as you eat, wait until the meal is finished and you are leaving to exchange business cards.   |
| Addressing your boss by his/her first name when around others.   | Office protocol, which differs from office to office even within one organization, determines who is called by his/her first name and who is called by a courtesy title. Even if your boss has told you to use his/her first name, use his/her title when in front of others. The exception is the office where everyone, regardless of rank, is called by his or her first name all the time. |
| Wearing grungy, athletic, or beach attire on casual dress days.  | Casual dress days that are offered at least once a week simply means relaxing your attire a bit. It does not mean wearing sweats, tank tops, jeans, baseball caps, low-cut tops, ultrashort skirts, shorts or backless shoes to work. When you have an appointment on casual dress days, dress as you would on the other days.   |

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**Sources:**

Shah, K. (2000). The P's and Q's of Business Etiquette. Taft College.  
[http://www.taft.cc.ca.us/Bus54/business\\_etiquette.htm](http://www.taft.cc.ca.us/Bus54/business_etiquette.htm)



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