

# SUN BUSINESS

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## Practise corporate ethics

By Kelley Keehn



I'm often shocked and surprised at the deteriorating level of etiquette in the corporate world and at a personal level.

Don't get me wrong; I'm not asking for the return of the Victorian era. But how about asking the guy in the three-piece suit and cufflinks at the table next to me to stop digging the salad out of his teeth with his pinky finger?

Can I ask for a city-wide ban on picking anything in public? Where have our manners gone and should they be refined at least during our working hours?



First impressions

Whatever my personal desire for the formality of years past to return, do businesses acknowledge the need for polishing elegance skills?

John Miller, with AIC Inc., a mutual fund company with more than \$10 billion in assets, agrees that good business manners are an important element in any corporate interaction. Being "polished" in business is critical; after all, it's the first impression that's judged most highly, Miller said.

However, he cautioned that many other levels of professionalism must be present. AIC Inc. takes a holistic approach to training its sales team. It stresses training in presentation skills, product knowledge, value-added servicing and of course, some corporate etiquette. Miller was quick to point out that you "can't just dress people up without substance."

Blue collar rules?

While I was lunching with Wes Schneider, president of Rainbow Transport last year, he provided a valuable lesson in blue-collar rules. After inquiring why he was dressed to the hilt on a Friday, he quickly responded that as the head of his ship he

doesn't believe in casual Fridays, and doesn't favour dressing down - neither him nor his staff - on any day of the business week.

"Just because we're a trucking firm doesn't mean that we need to look like one."

Sue Jacques, President of Influence, an etiquette and protocol training company out of Calgary, likes to focus on the positive when honing our corporate manners.

"It's about respect and professionalism," she said.

Jacques offers five tips to transformation.

Tip No. 1: Be on time! Whether personally or professionally, this rule is about respect. Everyone is increasingly conscious of their time. Keeping someone waiting or being late yourself disrespects everyone.

Tip No. 2: Represent yourself professionally and your company with pride. Appearance is judged before anyone hears you speak, and is an essential element. But not everyone needs to wear a suit and tie.

A professional is anyone that goes to work, whether a city worker driving a truck or the CEO of a major corporation. Each position requires a specific form of dress and should be embraced. It's a reflection of you and your company. If a tie is required, don't fight it every workday. It's as important as the hard hat for the construction worker. An employee needs to respect her company's dress policy and not view it as an act of obedience.

It's about professionalism

Tip No. 3: Be with the person you're talking to. There's nothing more annoying or disrespectful than a person that is preoccupied doing other things during your conversation or meeting. While you're on the phone, shut your computer off and just be there with your caller.

Typing, checking e-mails or other distracting multi-tasking activities can often be heard and noticed by the other person on the line. In face-to-face meetings, shut off your cellphone! Not only is it intrusive, but oftentimes the caller just wants your voice mail anyway. If you're in a meeting or have a mouth full of pasta, think twice about answering your phone.

Tip No. 4: Walk away from the water cooler. A true professional knows how to avoid negativity and gossip without making a big deal about it. Oftentimes the person looking to create a stir is just deflecting from their own inadequacies. And if they're talking about someone else, they're likely talking about you, too. Gently change the subject, create a diversion such as excusing yourself for another task, but keep it light instead of confronting the naysayer or gossipier.

Tip No. 5: Establish your personal code of ethics. None of us is perfect, and there's always room for improvement. But if you don't know what you stand for, you may not realize when you're compromising your enthusiasm and passion for what you do.

The dining room is as important as the boardroom. Take a look at the list above and examine your personal and professional rules of etiquette. Good manners shouldn't stop or start at 9 a.m. on Monday and end at 5 p.m. on Friday. Have fun and please, carry a toothpick from now on; you just never know who's watching.

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