

Leadership Tips, Spring 2005

Practice Gender Neutral Etiquette and Intercultural Courtesy.

(Feel free to forward this e-mail or use it for a team discussion.)

Gender-Neutral Etiquette

Men and women are treated equally in business settings. What is acceptable behavior on a date is inappropriate in the office. Gender-neutral etiquette means that everyone is treated respectfully and courteously, regardless of gender. Here are some tips to make sure you treat men and women equally.

- Shake hands with both men and women. Use a firm grip, not limp and not too strong.
- Stand and greet people who enter your office or cubicle.
- Use “Ms.” if you don’t know what form of address a woman prefers. Wait for her to correct you if she prefers “Miss” or “Mrs.”
- Make introductions and open doors according to rank. Higher-ups and customers always go first.
- At meals, everyone orders their own food unless the menu has been pre-ordered. The host orders the wine and pays the bill.
- Don’t use endearments such as “Honey,” “Sweetheart,” or “Dear.”
- Watch your language. Waiters and waitresses are servers. Stewardesses are flight attendants. Secretaries are usually administrative assistants. (Never call them “girls” or “Girl Friday,” even if they are female.) Mailmen, policemen, and firemen are, respectively, mail or postal carriers, police officers, and firefighters.

Intercultural Courtesy

The United States is a multicultural society. Each culture brings different values, habits, practices, beliefs, and etiquette or protocol. Differences can be very stimulating and rewarding, and they can be challenging. It is useful to be aware of differences and show sensitivity to people who are not like you.

There are at least seven primary areas to be aware of differences, which can be sensitive if ignored. Observe reactions, ask questions about different cultures, and learn what is appropriate in various settings.

1. **Business cards** – In the United States, business cards are generally treated casually without much protocol. In other cultures, the exchange of business cards is a ritual.
2. **Eye contact** – In the United States, direct eye contact means you are honest, forthright and approachable. In many other cultures, some see eye contact as rude and aggressive.
3. **Smiling** – In the United States, smiling is seen as a friendly and positive gesture. Some cultures interpret a smile as an indicator that you have not understood the message.
4. **Touch** – Some people in the United States are comfortable taking people by the arm or patting them on the back. Be very careful because touch can be offensive.
5. **Names and titles** – What's comfortable for you may be too informal for others. Find out how to accurately pronounce others' names and what title they prefer.
6. **Body language and gestures** – Gestures are not universal. Learn what is polite in the various cultures represented at your workplace.
7. **Personal space** – Getting too close or positioning yourself too far from someone is another issue. In the United States, most people prefer a distance of about two feet around them, but comfort zones greatly vary. Watch for people's reactions and make the necessary adjustments.

Keep an open mind, be a keen observer, and be willing to learn about other cultures. Remember that your way is not always the right way.

Let us know if you would like more information about our team building, communication, and conflict management workshops and services.

Warmly,

Marilyn and The Consulting Team

(Contents of this newsletter taken from, *Developing as a Professional*, by Dr. Marilyn Manning and Patricia Haddock. Please e-mail us if you would like an autographed copy, \$13.95 + shipping. The book is also available through Amazon.com.)

Drawing: Send us an e-mail describing your favorite "Communication Tip" by June 1st and your name will be entered in a drawing for a copy of *Developing as a Professional*.

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