



Information Overload

Issue 11, July 2003

Welcome:

In this month's issue we will be continuing our look at "Workplace Etiquette" and how it impacts on the work that we do, and the relationships we have with our customers. Our customers can be either internal (other staff members) or external (the general public, suppliers or service providers). The quality of these relationships and therefore their experience that they have of us, the level of service that they receive, and their desire to re-use our services is directly related to the quality of our own personal views on workplace etiquette as well as the etiquette of the organisations in which we work.

We hope you enjoy reading.

In this Issue we will be looking at:

- Working in an Open Plan Environment
- Personal Hygiene
- Misuse of Company Property
- Misuse of Company Time
- Office Politics
- ARRM Update
- A Thought to Ponder

Working in an Open Plan

Environment

Working in a open plan environment can be difficult, stressful and sometimes mildly entertaining depending on your point of view. You can learn an awful lot about your work colleagues in a very short space of time without resorting to gossip or eavesdropping simply by being a good listener. Of course your colleagues are also storing up a lot of information about you and your work and personal habits too, so it might be worth remembering a few important but basic "rules."

Private conversations – should be exactly that. Unless you want everyone to know about your private life that is.

Chatting – Can be very disruptive to those people around you who are trying to work.

Brainstorming – Yes it's great to do, but arrange for a meeting room so that you can be as creative as you like.

Volume – Have you noticed that when a group of people get together, the conversation gets louder and body language becomes more animated the longer the conversation goes on? This can be extremely disruptive, but perhaps not as much as when the volume is not only loud but also **inappropriate**. Today's society is a wide and culturally diverse one. What one person may find acceptable, another person may find completely unacceptable. Not everyone finds mass joke telling and practical jokes funny, and may find the matter offensive, causing stress and intimidation as people feel that they cannot speak out for fear of recrimination. If you notice a certain segment of the office makes an excuse to leave every time something loud and inappropriate occurs then it is likely that you have just offended a number of your work colleagues. As most organisations work on the basis of team performance, then it is likely that your team will not be functioning at its best.

General Housekeeping – If you insist on eating at your desk, remember to remove left overs. It prevents infestation and lingering odours, after all, not everyone wants to smell garlic all afternoon.

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Personal Hygiene

And whilst we are on the subject of lingering odours, it is worth mentioning the subject of personal hygiene. Stinky feet, bad breath, body odour, garlic and other aromatic foods, alcohol and cigarette smoke, overpowering perfume or cologne and the athletes who train at lunch time can all contribute to a rather interesting sensory mix that can be both offensive and at the same time a delicate subject to deal with. It can also tax an air conditioning system to the max especially on a hot day.

You will forgive us if we say that what follows is common sense, and I ask that you bear with me as I go through the basics for the “hard of washing.”

- Shower (or bath) at least once a day, and for goodness sake remember to use soap. Water on its own just doesn't work.
- Wash your hair and clothes regularly. Odours cling to hair and clothing fibres. If you frequent smoky bars and clubs please remember to launder your clothes before wearing them again.
- Change your deodorant regularly...it just doesn't work if you don't put it on.
- Oh, yes and if you like to eat spicy foods at lunch time, or enjoy a cigarette, you might want to keep a ready supply of mints or gum on hand to offset the smell, especially if you are dealing with clients and customers.

If you find people are holding their breath when they stand next to you, or slowly move away so you are “down wind” from where they are standing, then you might want to check your personal hygiene routine.

Misuse of Company Property:

There are a number of aspects to this very delicate subject, including the use or misuse of telephones, Internet and email, as well as removing items from the organisation for your own use.

There are a few people who deliberately go into work every day with the intention of deliberately defrauding the company that they work for. However, there are some things that we all probably do that you just don't think twice about. If you have ever made a personal phone call that lasted longer than a few minutes, or sent a non-work related email, or surfed the internet for non-work related information, then in reality you are misusing company property, although this will depend on individual organisations and their policies regarding such use. It also depends on the types of material that you receive and/or send on to family and friends or download from the Internet, as to the kind of response you will get from the organisation that you work for.

The other commonly misused company item is stationery. Why bother buying it, when the stationery cupboard is full? After all no one is going to notice – are they?

Time Management/Misuse of Company Time:

It's interesting, but most people don't think twice about “borrowing time” from their employer. Is it your employers' fault that the traffic was horrendous, or you overslept? All your employer sees is that you are not at your desk when you are supposed to be. Of course you could counter that by saying, but he/she isn't there when I work through my lunch break, or stay back late, they're only ever around on the odd occasion when I do happen to be late. If you think this is a bit harsh, then consider this question. If the number of hours that you worked each day was directly related to how much money you received at the end of each week would you be late in to work, or take a little longer during your lunch break? The answer is probably not. And of course, all those extra hours that you put in would actually be paid, not classed as unofficial unpaid overtime.

For those people who have to clock in and out of their workplace each day, this is already a reality. Included in this group are

those people who work in a factory environment, or where flex time is available, and to a lesser extent those people who are on contract and are required to fill out a time sheet on a daily basis, which is then signed off on a weekly basis by their supervisor, they too are paid according to the actual hours on site.

But there is another aspect to time management where borrowing time from your employer is not even considered by most people. What do you do with the time that you are at work? Do you work for every minute of every day doing work related activities? Of course you can't. People stop by and chat, that's all part of working with other people. But how many personal phone calls do you make or receive on a daily basis? Or how many non-work related emails do you send or read? How much time do you spend surfing the Internet for non-work related information? Of course if you don't have access to email or the Internet from your workstation then the chances of this happening are slight. But if you do spend some time on non-work related "electronic" activities, please bear in mind the company that you work for, might be monitoring your electronic communications and pathways.

Office Politics:

We have all been subjected to the effects of office politics at some point in our working lives. Being threatened, undermined, as well as back stabbing and gossip are all forms of politics that can be either subtle, or it can blatantly obvious, either way it can cause

offence, the working environment becomes strained, and in some cases people seek alternative employment just to get away from it.

Are you and your colleagues guilty of making snide comments about one person to another? If this kind of behaviour persists, then you may be guilty of a lot more than just indulging in a bit of office gossip. "Office politics" – can be defined as anything that harms, intimidates, threatens, victimises, undermines, offends, degrades or humiliates others, then you are not indulging in office politics but bullying, which can be dealt with under the OH&S legislation.

Before you say, but its just "gossip" then consider the fact that bullying can be as subtle as making inappropriate comments about a person's physical appearance, or constantly criticising a person about the way they do his or her job.

ARRM Update:

The **PHARMACY ACT** in the Northern Territories is rather interesting. Did you know that they are required to keep records of every prescription dispensed, compounded or made up by them, which sounds fair enough, until you discover that a retention period has not been provided!, so they have to keep their records permanently or face a fine of up to \$100 per breach.

A T thought to Ponder:

"The reason why so few people are agreeable in conversation is that each is thinking more about what he intends to say than about what others are saying and we never listen when we are eager to speak."

Duc de la Francois Rochefoucauld

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