



Information Overload

Issue 10, June 2003

Welcome:

Today we will be looking at one aspect of “Workplace Etiquette”. Whilst this may sound like trying to remember which fork to use at a business lunch, or that it’s all about common sense and good manners, there is a whole lot more to workplace etiquette than that. In fact, workplace etiquette plays a huge part in all your day-to-day activities, and is concerned with having an established set of structured principles and philosophies by which you can operate confidently and consistently across your professional platform. The subject of etiquette in the workplace is considerable, and one that cannot be covered by a single issue of the newsletter; well not if we want to do justice to the subject matter at any rate. So over the next few editions we will be looking at a number of significant areas of workplace etiquette including the misuse of company property, working in an open plan environment, bullying, sexual harassment and other hazards in the workplace, problems of office politics and the art of communication. Today’s issue looks at “presenteeism” and what we can all do to avoid this very real problem. We hope you enjoy reading.

In this Issue we will be looking at:

- Workplace Etiquette
- Presenteeism
- ARRM Update
- A Thought to Ponder

Workplace E tiquette:

Everything you say or do, how you dress, how you act and react in the workplace has its basis in etiquette. Etiquette is more than simple good manners, although this would be a good place to start for most people. It’s certainly more than knowing which fork to use when you attend the first of many business lunches or dinners. In fact workplace etiquette can be a minefield for the unwary and the uninitiated. Most people have the unfortunate task of learning all about workplace etiquette “on the job”, new employees – be they straight from school or university or from another organisation will see the organisational culture and will emulate it. If your workplace culture is not all it should be then unfortunately all you are doing is compounding an already serious problem.

Before you throw up your hands in despair and decide that it’s all too hard, there are a few simple things that you can do to ensure that your fellow workers are skilled in the art of workplace etiquette. One of these is an employee handbook. All organisations should have one, and should cover issues such as standards of dress, hours of work, lunch and tea breaks, overtime (if any), use of the telephone, email and internet, what to do in the event of fires, bombs and other threats, and so on.

If these are not written down and more importantly reinforced then you can hardly be upset if people are perceived to be flouting the rules if they do not know what those rules are. Your induction should cover the handbook in some depth, and then get participants to sign the declaration that says that they have read and understood.

It is important to remember that the culture of an organisation is the deciding factor in how workplace etiquette is perceived and more importantly handled by all parties. If your culture is right, then chances are you won’t have as many problems with

© IEA 2003. All rights reserved. You are free to use material from the Information Overload newsletter in whole or in part, as long as you include acknowledgement of source.

workplace etiquette as those whose culture needs some changes made to it.

Presenteeism:

Everyone understands what is meant by the term absenteeism, and the problems an organisation faces when workers take excessive amounts of time off work, usually because of ill health. Not many people understand what the term presenteeism is, although they do know the symptoms.

Whilst “presenteeism” is a “made-up word” the problems associated by it in the work place is a very real one.

Presenteeism does not have a “dictionary definition” but it can be described as going into work, when you are not feeling 100%, or “not firing on all cylinders”. It can also be part of an organisation’s culture to expect presenteeism to occur.

Carrying on regardless:

The difference between absenteeism and presenteeism is that with absenteeism the cost can be counted. The cost of presenteeism cannot easily be measured.

Absenteeism can cost an organisation thousands if not hundreds of thousands of dollars in lost productivity each year. The larger the organisation, the greater the cost will be, and the less money will be available to make business decisions, expand operations and other matters of significance to the organisation. Whilst some absences can be countered with the use of temporary or casual labour, the knowledge taken away by the person who is “off sick” cannot be easily and quickly replaced.

What most organisations are not yet aware of, is the cost to them when staff turn in for work, or stay at work when they should actually be at home.

How many times have you in fact gone into work with a cold, headache, stomach ache, gastro, migraine and other “minor” complaint, or decided to struggle through to

the end of the working day, even though you felt awful, your head felt like it was stuffed full of cotton wool and you just couldn’t think straight?

Just how effective were you? How much work did you actually get done? How much more work could you have done if you had been feeling 100%? How many people did you infect by your “noble” and “misguided” gesture by going into work, or staying at work when you should have in fact stayed at home and in bed?

Some people are under the misguided impression that an organisation cannot in fact run without them. Well Charles De Gaulle (1890 – 1970) was right when he said, “the graveyards are full of indispensable men.” In fact, it is very true to say that most people are completely dispensable, in that organisations do not grind to a halt when you or any of your other colleagues take holiday, or are off sick, or decide to leave and find another job. Although, productivity can be reduced dramatically if a significant number of people are away at any one time, an organisation will not shut its doors or switch off the telephones because they can’t cope without you.

So what has it got to do with workplace etiquette? – The answer is absolutely everything.

If you treat others the way that you expect to be treated, would you like it if one of your colleagues turns up for work with a cough and cold, the flu or tells you mid way through the working day that their child has been diagnosed with chicken pox or measles. No, me neither.

So next time you are not feeling 100%, but feel that you are doing your organisation a favour by staying at work, don’t. Not only are you infecting the rest of the office with whatever ailment is affecting you, you are actually costing your organisation money. Research conducted in 2002 by AdvancePCS in the United States, said that “employees who show up for work with

headaches, stomach aches or other common health conditions are costing their employers more than US\$180 billion annually.”

www.cch.com.au/fe_news.asp?document_id=23947&topic_code=1

I'm sure that if you take the "time" to be sick, you will be much more productive when you are well again.

A Cultural Issue:

The second aspect of presenteeism is an interesting one. Have you ever worked for an industry or organisation that expects you to put in long hours at work each day? Whilst an organisation may think that its personnel are being productive whilst they are "working", burn out, accidents, incidents and so on are more prevalent than those organisations who ensure that their workers take time off each day to go home, eat dinner and see their families. If you take for example, those jobs that expect their employees to undertake "call out" duties, on top of their normal ones. Or those organisations, which foster a culture of excessive amounts of overtime. How productive are these people going to be?

So which industries are more likely to foster a culture of presenteeism? Of course most people are aware of the excessive amounts of hours put in by hospital staff, especially the doctors and nurses. But what about those people who work for the fire and emergency services? IT departments, organisations who work to tight deadlines, such as newspapers, tv producers and

writers, maintenance staff, those people on "call out" and as recent events have shown, this presenteeism culture is alive and well in our armed forces. Recent conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, etc etc have seen some armed forces away from home and family for months on end. I should know, my brother-in-law is one of them. And in the height of battle it is very hard for the ground pounders to actually be allowed "time off" from their duties, because in doing so they may not only endanger themselves, but that of their colleagues as well.

So, whilst the cost of presenteeism through ill health is considerable, the reality of a presenteeism culture may be more damaging to the general health and well being of its employees, than those who should have stayed in bed this morning.

ARRM Update:

The NSW Apiaries Regulation 1995 covers not apes but bees. Did you know that Beekeepers should keep records relating to the movement of the hives? Including the date and number moved, the site moved from and to, and the name of the person who moved the beehives (s.9); They should also keep records relating to the loss or theft of beehives including the date and the number lost or stolen. Records should be kept for a period of 5 years, failure to do so can incur a penalty of 5 units per breach.

A T hought to Ponder:

“The hardest job kids face today is learning good manners without seeing any.”

Fred Astaire
(1899 – 1987)
US Dancer & Actor

Please feel free to pass on this newsletter to your colleagues friends and associates. To subscribe they should send an e-mail to training@iea.com.au with "subscribe newsletter" in the subject line. If you would prefer not to receive this newsletter, please send an email to training@iea.com.au with "unsubscribe newsletter" in the subject line. If you have any suggestions as to what should be included in future editions, then please send an email to training@iea.com.au.

© IEA 2003. All rights reserved. You are free to use material from the Information Overload newsletter in whole or in part, as long as you include acknowledgement of source.

Information Enterprises Australia Pty Ltd
Unit 4, Upper Level, 201 High Street, FREMANTLE WA 6160
Tel: 08 9335 2533 Fax: 08 9335 2544 e-mail: training@iea.com.au