

Etiquette Tips for Techno-Geeks

Group Luncheon Presentation

Western Association of Convention & Visitors Bureaus

Thursday April 13, 2007, Noon-1:30pm

You might be wondering why, as handsome as I am, why a Director of Career Services is here to talk about...of all things... eEtiquette?

In addition to persuading employers to hire our students, a big part of my job is to help students become EMPLOYABLE. I've been in this role for over fourteen years, and eEtiquette is becoming a bigger and bigger pet peeve with employers.

To illustrate, let's say you are reviewing resumes for an open position in your office. What image comes to mind if the candidate's e-mail address happens to be... HOT BIKER BABE@xyz.com? How about Koreansweetie@xyz.com? These are actual e-mail addresses I've seen students use.

Let's take this example to another level. Would you consider a job candidate to be mature and ready for a professional position if you called him or her and instead of hearing a professional voice mail message, you heard Marvin Gaye's hit song, Sexual Healing instead. Not a good image right?

We tell students that they only have one shot at making a good first impression. Long gone are the days when we would establish our professional image by wearing a blue suit to an interview. With the advent of voice mail, ring tones, and social networking sites like My Space, our image—good or bad—can be communicated around the world in an instant.

How does this apply to you? It's critical for professionals, at all levels, to care for their personal brand. You must be aware of how others perceive you. Because of the rapidly networked world we live in, the rules of etiquette have become blurred, and this blurred effect can cause potential harm to your professional image, if you don't pay attention to it.

eEtiquette is a constantly evolving area because as soon as one rule is written for a certain mass communications device, a new device is introduced into the marketplace,

and we have to start all over trying to figure out what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior.

The fourth largest staffing agency in the world-- Radstand USA – conducted a recent survey that measured pet peeves in the workplace. It was reported that ringing cell phones annoy 30% of working adults. The only work-place pet peeve that ranked higher was loud talkers...undoubtedly they were gas-bagging on their cell phones!

Let's face it, your boss, co-workers and especially your customers aren't interested in hearing about your personal, medical, and romantic issues. A University of Michigan poll released during the recent Cellular Telecommunications and Internet Association Expo found that six in 10 cell phone users say that using a cell phone in public can be a major irritation.

CBS News Technology Analyst Larry Magid said a new catch phrase – cell yell—has emerged because people have a tendency to talk louder when they're making a call. Magid added that cell phone users, like smokers are becoming social pariahs. Stories are circulating from my colleagues that students have actually answered their cell phones DURING AN ON-CAMPUS INTERVIEW. How can anyone think it's appropriate to take a call during an interview??? And yes, I'm sorry to report that I heard of a student that actually checked his Blackberry during an interview.

My fiancé is on the faculty at a small liberal arts college and she was recently asked to call a few prospective students that applied to her program. What she found was that the prospective students were just fine with discussing a very important topic, like picking the right college to attend, in a car full of girls on their way to the mall. What happened to caring about the content of the call? Why didn't this young lady care about how she was being perceived by the caller? Doesn't she care about her image? It's a real shame that most people can't distinguish between an important call and BS call. The lines of 'respecting the caller' have blurred—and it's not a good thing.

In preparation for this session, I conducted my own, highly **un**scientific, survey of working professionals. I e-mailed a few alumni working at Fortune 100 companies and

asked if any rules had been introduced to guide employee conduct as more electronic tools are entering the workplace.

Results???? 100% of the respondents said there were no formal policies at their place of business; but some reported that informal guidelines were beginning to emerge on a case by case basis.

Here are a few examples of those informal guidelines:

- Laptops are banned at most meetings to control instant messaging, web surfing and e-mailing.
- Professionals consider a vibrating cell phone just as impolite as a ringing phone.
- Texting is widely frowned upon during a meeting.
- In some cases, it is acceptable to look at caller ID when a call comes in, then leave the room if the call was deemed urgent.

One alum told me that because their meeting rooms have a T-1 connection at every seat, texting and web surfing became a huge problem during team meetings. The result? The division had to institute a “when the meeting starts the laptops are closed” rule to ensure everyone pays attention.

The most interesting thing I heard from alumni was that teams weren't waiting for official policies to come down from Human Resources or the CEO's office, the teams were taking matters into their own hands. It appears that many of these professionals were fed up with the un-professional behavior of their peers. These are the folks that constantly check their voice mail, e-mail, text, and instant messages when they should be paying attention and participating in formal meetings. Team members were 'frowning upon' those who were compulsively checking their Blackberries by creating team rules to ensure everyone stayed focused. This is how the rules of etiquette evolve. It won't be long before companies will have to define the proper use of electronic devices; just like they did 10 years ago when Casual Friday's got so far out of hand that companies had to define Business Casual attire.

As professionals, we need to move towards some kind of balance in our behavior. How many in this room are expecting a baby, working on a cure for cancer or helping to bring

an end to the war in Iraq? Those are the kinds of calls and message that need to be returned immediately. Let's face it, every call or message doesn't warrant an immediate response. I don't expect the standard business calls I make to be returned in 10 minutes or even four hours—unless I tell the person that we're in an emergency situation; then I'm hoping for a quick response.

We need to be less compulsive when it comes to interacting with our mobile devices. Why? Because this kind of behavior can harm a career. Who wants to have a compulsive message checker on their work team? I hear about it from our students—XYZ person misses parts of meetings because he just has to take his calls. Their work is turned in late, this particular person isn't considered dedicated to the task, the entire team suffers because the random incoming call or text message is more important than the team meeting; and in turn... this person is labeled by his peers as unproductive. Who will want this person on their next team project?

Here are a few eEtiquette Tips for the Compulsive Techno-Geek Professional

- If you're not able to give the call or message 100% of your attention, let it go to voicemail. Few calls and text messages are truly urgent.
- Respect the caller by finding a private space to conduct business; and by all means, lower your voice.
- Grow-up, cute ring tones are for teenagers not professionals.
- Your ability to drive safely is compromised when holding a phone to your ear.
- Like to drive and text? Your messages aren't important enough to put the lives of others in danger, so stop it.

The following are company-wide values that can be adapted to your fit your situation.

Value #1 – FOCUS ON THE BUSINESS PARTNER. Meetings with customers, vendors, and guests require 100% of our attention 100% of the time.

Value #2 – INTERNAL GROUP DYNAMICS. Meetings with company associates require 100% of our undivided attention 100% of the time.

Value #3 – COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT. Representing the Company in the community is an honor, so demonstrate a high level of professional behavior by focusing your attention on the task.

And finally – here are a few eEtiquette Tips to Guide Professional Behavior

- Phones go on vibrate upon entering the office.

- Team meetings are distraction-free zones. All devices are turned off and laptops are not allowed in the meeting room, unless for the purpose of taking meeting minutes.
- Emergencies happen, leave the room as quietly as possible and deal with the situation like a professional.
- Turn all electronic devices off when in an executive level meeting or board meeting.

In conclusion, there is no doubt that the introduction of new web-based business tools are having a positive impact on the global economy, but one negative side effect persists; how do we use these tools without eroding the essence of civility?

Society is witnessing an increase in boorish behavior. Local governments are introducing laws to control the use of these devices to protect public safety and the workplace itself is beginning to feel the side effects of people behaving badly.

I hope that my comments will encourage you to look for creative and balanced ways to address these sometimes delicate issues at work.

Thank-you to the organizers of the Western Association of Convention & Visitors Bureaus for inviting me to speak today, and thank you for your kind attention.

I hope you enjoy the rest of this event and your time in Albuquerque.