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# How to Use Business Etiquette

By Dr. Kathleen Begley, Book Author and Professional Speaker

**Note to Readers:** *This free e-newsletter, sent only upon request, comes from Dr. Kathleen Begley, owner of Write Company Plus communications training. She writes weekly on topics connected to business and personal success. Dr. Begley also does a blog called "Meandering to a Different Drummer." Click onto the website address at the end of this article to read her musings on careers, finances, and how to put up drywall.*

I spent the past few days out West giving a writing seminar to top-rated employees at a major organization. On the first day, I forgot my laptop, which I needed to show PowerPoint slides. Because my hotel was across the street from the training location, I was able to get my equipment and return to the class in less than 10 minutes. The participants wrote while I was gone.

For the first hour or so after I returned, I used the class workbook to explain communication concepts. During the morning break, I connected my computer to the projector. Unfortunately, the remote control needed to complete the hook-up was missing. I was forced to borrow one from another training room. After the break, the PowerPoints were up and running perfectly.

Although I thought I had seamlessly handled both oopsies – one mine, one not mine --the woman in charge of logistics had a different opinion. Without my knowledge, she called my client, who happens to live and work in the Southeast, to complain about me. She said she was concerned about my ability to teach the class. That evening, I found out that I had been secretly dissed. My client was supportive, but concerned -- understandably so.

I was flabbergasted, not so much about the logistics person being upset, but about her going above my head. As you undoubtedly know, one of the most important laws of business etiquette is to speak first to the individual causing you distress. Otherwise, you're a big snitch. By the time I learned of the problem and wished to discuss the issues, the logistics person was off on a two-day holiday. I never saw her again.

But the incident got me thinking about rules of office behavior. On a website called [www.ravenwerks.com](http://www.ravenwerks.com), I found the following oh-so-true statement. "Business etiquette is made up of significantly more important things than knowing which fork to use at lunch with a client." Besides not raising a stink behind someone's back, here are a few other ideas:

**Bite your tongue.** If a colleague excitedly tells you that she just got a call from a major recruiter, refrain from blabbing the information from here to Indonesia. Keep others' confidences if you expect them to do the same with yours.

**Credit your boss.** Many workers freak out when managers accept praise for subordinates' efforts. If you have this attitude, get over it. In most organizations, your job is to make your boss look good, not to get praise for yourself.

**Meet deadlines.** Chronically handing in work late can be a nail in the coffin of your career. Often, an unfinished piece of a project can prohibit other team members from completing their work. The ripple effect always draws attention to the source.



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**Avoid peeping.** Sure, when someone leaves their workstation without closing the current document on their computer screen, you may be tempted to read the information. Discipline yourself not to. How would you like colleagues checking out your work output?

**Refill equipment.** Let's say the office copier runs out of paper just as you're finishing reproducing 100 copies of a 18-page sales analysis. You're tempted to walk away as fast as you can. Forget it. Business etiquette dictates that you should get the copier ready for the next person.

**Speak softly.** In today's cubicle environment, loud talking makes it difficult for nearby co-workers to focus. Bring the volume down a notch. If you're unable to do so, take a walk outdoors to finish your conversation.

**Tidy up.** Nobody wants to grab a soda or pastry from the vending machine in a dirty break room. After you're finished devouring five candy bars, put the wrappers in the waste can. The same goes for disposable glasses, cups, plates, saucers, and flatware. After all, office cleanliness is next to office likeableness – always a plus when it's time to ask for a raise and a promotion during your next evaluation.

*Dr. Kathleen Begley has written seven books and gives corporate seminars on topics such as writing persuasively, presenting confidently, and managing positively. You can call her at 610-429-1562 or e-mail her at [KBegley@writecompanyplus.com](mailto:KBegley@writecompanyplus.com). She responds to everybody!*