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Insights from Ivan Venegas, Managing Partner of IMSA Search Global Partners Chile and Founder of JobLine

With the Covid pandemic in the proverbial rearview mirror, most companies have instituted a Return To Office (RTO) policy of at least a few days a week in person for most workers. As the worldwide workforce returns to the office, many employees, particularly Gen Z will find workplace social norms and behaviors unfamiliar.

Gen Z Desires Face-to-Face Interaction

Gen Z'ers, defined as those born between the mid-90's and late-00's, began to enter the workforce just as Covid forced the world into the new work-from-home (WFH) reality, eliminating their opportunity for in-person interactions, mentoring, and role modeling during their early careers. Because they are digital natives, many assume they have a strong preference for WFH. However, research shows that Gen Z wants to be in the office, at least part time. According to the 2023 Young Generation in Tech survey of 2,000 20-30 year-olds across 7 European countries, 56% said they prefer to work in person 4+ days/week. As they enter the in-person workworld, this group will want to pay extra attention to the norms of their workplace.

At the same time, regardless of age or seniority, many employees will want to do a quick reflection of their own behavior to ensure they are projecting the image they want.

Top 10 Tips for Strong Office Etiquette

We all want to make a good impression with supervisors, co-workers, clients, and partners. We want to be perceived as professional, competent, and team players. Here are 10 basic office behaviors to reinforce positive impressions:

1 – Show up on-time – or better yet, a few minutes early.

Being punctual projects dependability and strength; it also shows respect for the team. If you are going to be late, let others know so they will not be waiting.

2 – Be considerate and project a positive attitude.

A warm greeting and a smile go a long way toward setting the stage for an atmosphere of positivity. Bringing good vibes to a meeting also projects confidence.

3 – Refer to people by their names; engage with everyone, at every level.

It shows you respect and value them as people, regardless of the company org chart. How you treat people matters.

4 – Dress for success.

Company dress codes vary, so be aware of the office norm.

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asserts, "Note, there are exceptions. In meetings across the world, I have found that in some departments, for example advertising and technology, many of the most talented professionals have a different dress code than the rest of the company. They tend to be more creative which may translate to more casual (including tattoos, colored hair, piercings, etc.) than the rest of the organization."

5 – Help those around you.

Whether it's as simple as offering to help when coworkers are on deadline, or offering an encouraging gesture when someone seems unhappy, be a team player.

6 – Keep your space organized and uncluttered.

A clean desk projects a sense of competence. Eat in designated areas; coworkers will appreciate your helping to keep the office a pleasant environment for everyone, particularly when so many are shared and co-working spaces.

7 – Return phone calls and emails within 24 hours, even if just to say you will respond later. This lets the person know you received their message and it did not go into a spam folder; a quick response makes others feel respected, and allows others to plan accordingly.

8 – Always review your written communications for content, grammar, spelling, and formatting.

Underlining, bolding, coloring, enlarged fonts, and italics can seem aggressive. Use spell and grammar check. Reread before hitting "send." And use the NYTimes test – never put anything in writing you wouldn't mind seeing on the front page.

9 – Be alert and demonstrate genuine interest – make eye contact; turn towards people when they are speaking; offer a firm handshake, a fist/elbow bump, or whatever greeting is culturally appropriate, especially when meeting people for the first time.

10 – Listen more than you speak, don't interrupt, and avoid public confrontation.

Be attentive to others; when you speak, have something meaningful to contribute. Avoid repeating what others have already stated. Avoid confrontation in public meetings; arrange for a private conversation to resolve issues.

The Importance of Etiquette in International Business

In today's globally connected world, cross-cultural intelligence can enhance business results. Careful attention should be paid to differences in cultural and social norms. Understanding these and acting appropriately avoids misunderstanding, and shows empathy and respect for clients in other countries. By establishing common ground, one can build trust and strengthen important relationships.

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