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The Importance of Knowing Business Etiquette

In the professional world, technical skills and qualifications may get you in the door, but business etiquette is what keeps you in the room. It is the unwritten code that governs how people interact in professional settings — encompassing everything from how you greet a colleague to how you conduct yourself in a boardroom negotiation.

Understanding and practicing business etiquette is not about rigid formality or outdated social rituals. It is about demonstrating respect, building trust, and communicating that you are someone others can rely on.

First Impressions Are Lasting

The moment you walk into a professional setting, you are being evaluated — consciously or not. A firm handshake, steady eye contact, a warm but measured greeting, and appropriate attire all signal competence before a single word of substantive conversation is exchanged. Research in social psychology consistently shows that people form lasting impressions within the first few seconds of meeting someone. Business etiquette gives you the tools to make those seconds work in your favor. Conversely, a poor first impression — arriving late, checking your phone mid-introduction, or dressing inappropriately — can overshadow genuine talent and hard work for a long time.

It Builds Professional Relationships

At its core, business is built on relationships. Whether you are working with clients, managing a team, collaborating with peers, or negotiating with vendors, the quality of those relationships directly affects outcomes. Etiquette is the foundation on which strong professional relationships are built. Remembering names, following through on commitments, responding to emails in a timely manner, and expressing genuine appreciation for others' contributions are all acts of etiquette that accumulate into trust over time. People want to work with those who make them feel respected. Etiquette is simply the practice of doing that consistently.

It Enhances Your Professional Reputation

Your reputation in the workplace is one of your most valuable career assets, and it is largely shaped by how you treat people. Professionals who demonstrate courtesy, tact, and poise become known for those qualities. Over time, this reputation opens doors — to promotions, key projects, leadership opportunities, and referrals. On the other hand, someone who interrupts in meetings, takes credit for others' work, or speaks disparagingly about colleagues will develop a reputation that limits their advancement regardless of their technical abilities. Etiquette is not performative politeness — it reflects genuine character, and character is what sustains a long career.

It Navigates Cross-Cultural Complexity

In today's globalized business environment, professionals routinely interact with colleagues, clients, and partners from different cultural backgrounds. What is considered polite in one culture may be offensive in another. Eye contact, physical distance during conversation, punctuality expectations, the exchange of business cards, and even the appropriate way to address someone all vary significantly across cultures. A working knowledge of international business etiquette demonstrates cultural intelligence and shows that you have taken the time to understand and respect the people you are engaging with. This not only prevents costly misunderstandings but also signals maturity and global awareness — qualities that are increasingly prized in modern organizations.

It Shapes Workplace Culture

Every organization has a culture, and the behavior of its people defines it. When professionals practice good etiquette — arriving on time, listening actively, communicating clearly, and treating everyone with courtesy regardless of their position — they contribute to a healthy and productive workplace culture. The opposite is also true. Incivility is contagious. Studies have shown that rude or dismissive behavior in the workplace can spread through teams, reducing morale, creativity, and performance. Leaders who model strong etiquette set the tone for their entire organization. Knowing

and practicing these norms means you are actively contributing to an environment where people can do their best work.

It Is Critical in Digital Communication

Business etiquette has expanded well beyond face-to-face interaction. A significant portion of professional communication now happens through email, video calls, messaging platforms, and social media. Each of these channels carries its own set of norms. Knowing when to use a formal tone versus a casual one, how to structure a professional email, when a video call is more appropriate than a message, and how to represent yourself on professional networks like LinkedIn are all part of modern business etiquette. Failing to observe these norms — sending a poorly written email, being distracted during a video call, or posting unprofessional content online — can damage your credibility just as quickly as any in-person misstep.

It Supports Career Advancement

When employers and senior leaders evaluate candidates for promotion or high-profile assignments, they look beyond competence. They consider polish, judgment, and the ability to represent the organization well. Business etiquette is a direct expression of all three. A professional who knows how to behave appropriately at a client dinner, how to introduce senior executives at an event, or how to handle a sensitive workplace conflict with discretion demonstrates a level of professional maturity that signals readiness for greater responsibility. In many cases, etiquette is the differentiating factor between two equally qualified candidates.

It Reflects Self-Awareness

Ultimately, business etiquette is an expression of self-awareness. It requires you to consider how your behavior affects others — to step outside your own perspective and recognize that the people around you deserve to be treated with care and consideration. This quality, sometimes described as emotional intelligence, is one of the most important predictors of professional success. People who understand social norms and navigate them gracefully tend to be better communicators, better leaders, and better colleagues.

In a world increasingly focused on hard skills and measurable outputs, business etiquette is easy to overlook. But it remains one of the quiet forces that shapes careers, builds organizations, and defines how professionals are remembered. Knowing it is not optional — it is essential.

HEAR MORE FROM SHARON HILL AT THE 2026 AENC ANNUAL MEETING ON MONDAY, JULY 27TH IN CABARRUS COUNTY, NC. [REGISTER TO JOIN HERE.](#)

About the Author: [Sharon A. Hill](#) brings the polish of corporate America to audiences worldwide. With an MBA and over two decades of experience as a development and marketing manager at Fortune 500 powerhouse IBM, Sharon knows what it takes to succeed in today's competitive business landscape.

As founder and president of [Sharon Hill International](#), she combines her corporate expertise with certified training from the American Business Etiquette Trainers Association to deliver transformative speaking experiences. Her unique approach weaves together business etiquette, workplace diversity, and organizational behavior insights from her MBA research.

Sharon has become a sought-after authority on American business etiquette, empowering companies, universities, professional associations, and individuals to navigate the modern workplace with confidence and grace. Whether you're climbing the corporate ladder or building your own empire, Sharon's practical wisdom helps you make every impression count.

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