

Business
Etiquette

the new rules in a
digital age



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Excellence in Professional Staffing

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	1
The New Rules of Etiquette	2
Professional Networking Sites, Including LinkedIn	3
Social Networking Sites, Including Facebook.....	7
Twitter	11
5 Questions to Ask Yourself About Social and Professional Networking Sites.....	13
E-mail	15
Instant Messaging.....	18
Mobile Devices	20
Phone, Video and Web Conferencing	22
Sticky Etiquette Questions	24
Conclusion.....	25
About Robert Half.....	25



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The New Rules of Etiquette

"Politeness is to human nature what warmth is to wax."

~Arthur Schopenhauer, 19th century philosopher



You've mastered traditional business etiquette, seamlessly reaching for the right fork during a professional dinner while engaging in animated conversation with your dining companions. But at a time in which more business discussions take place via LinkedIn, Twitter or e-mail than over cocktails and hors d'oeuvres, it's just as important – if not more so – to know how to present yourself professionally using digital tools.

Given the newness of social media and other communications vehicles, it's easy to say or do the wrong thing. Unfortunately, missteps in this area can have lasting consequences: An online mistake can show up next to your name in an Internet search for years to come. To help you avoid falling victim to such blunders, Robert Half has created this guide offering insights into digital protocols, as well as advice for handling sticky situations. The information and tips are based on surveys of executives, independent research, input from social media and etiquette experts, and our own experiences working with job candidates and clients throughout North America. We hope you find this guide useful and invite you to contact us at **1.800.803.8367** for more information or help with any of your staffing or employment needs.



Professional Networking Sites, Including LinkedIn



Are you linking in or being left out? Professional networking sites are among the most popular ways of nurturing professional relationships today. Networking online is no different than rubbing shoulders at in-person networking events – it’s important to make a positive impression and follow the rules of the road. Here are some ways to get the most out of [LinkedIn](#) and similar websites:

- ▶ **Complete your profile.** Provide as much information in your LinkedIn profile as you can. This might include your professional summary, work history and education. Be sure to add key accomplishments so other users get a clear picture of your capabilities, and request recommendations from past colleagues and managers. They can highlight and praise your accomplishments in a far richer and more credible way.
- ▶ **Request recommendations individually.** Treat each request with the same respect you would in “the real world.” A generic message asking all of your connections to endorse you may fall on deaf ears. Think about it: Why create a personal recommendation for someone who can't write personally to request one? When appropriate (and if it's permissible by your company), recommend those whom you know the best and trust the most. Be careful, however, of what may be perceived as quid pro quo recommendations: If you recommend someone just as he or she has posted some kind words about you, your kudos may be viewed as “payback.”



- ▶ **Prioritize quality over quantity.** Network envy can make some people link aimlessly just to build their number of contacts. Don't invite strangers to your network merely to make it larger, and don't be offended when those you've never met or vaguely know ignore your requests. Your network is only as strong as its weakest connection.
- ▶ **Be a joiner.** LinkedIn offers many groups for people who share certain passions or interests, and these can be a valuable asset for keeping pace with new developments in your field. When participating in professional groups, provide useful information and input. Avoid sending direct messages to fellow group members unless you have established a personal connection beforehand.

10 Top LinkedIn Professional Groups

Good business etiquette on LinkedIn includes participating in discussions and doing small favors for others. The following are the top 10 LinkedIn Groups ranked by number of members.* To access the LinkedIn Groups Directory, go to the search box and click on "Groups" from the pull-down menu:

1. Linked: HR (#1 Human Resources Group)
2. Job Openings, Job Leads and Job Connections!
3. eMarketing Association Network
4. Job & Career Network
5. Executive Suite
6. On Startups – The Community For Entrepreneurs
7. Consultants Network
8. Job & Career Network – Professions and Industries
9. Telecom Professionals
10. The Project Manager Network – #1 Group For Project Managers

You also may want to find out if your various alumni and trade associations have any LinkedIn groups. If so, be sure to join those you find most appealing.

**Ranked as of Jan. 26, 2011. Top listings subject to change.*

- ▶ **Say 'please' and be respectful.** If you would like an introduction to someone in a contact's network, ask politely and explain why you hope to meet the other person. For example, you might point out that the potential contact is in a professional association of interest to you.
- ▶ **Think twice before you say yes.** When members of your network request introductions to your other contacts, don't immediately agree, particularly if you don't know very well the person who is making the request. Your reputation is on the line if your contact ends up becoming a nuisance to that individual. It also is common practice now for "hyper networkers" to add as many LinkedIn connections as possible to mine data from your profile and those of your friends.

How to Tend to Your Network in Only Five Minutes a Day:

Networking online doesn't need to be time consuming. You can develop your professional reputation and help others in the process through simple etiquette practices that require only a few minutes each day.

1. **Be the first to have a point of view.** Share a relevant news article and add value by including an observation that may not be so obvious to others.
2. **Let them know they've been heard.** Listen to what your network has to say so you can make an informed suggestion or relevant introduction.
3. **Establish yourself as the go-to person.** Consider connecting your LinkedIn and Twitter accounts to establish more visibility. Tweet your professional ideas and links into your profile using the hash tag #in. (However, think twice before connecting your LinkedIn account to sites such as [Foursquare](#), or other location-based social networks. It's unlikely people in your professional network really need to know where you just ate lunch.)
4. **Try to add at least one new person to your network a week.** Growing networks are far more effective than stagnant ones.



Professional Networking Sites, Including LinkedIn

- ▶ **Make the connection clear.** Too often, people connect without thinking. When seeking to make a new contact, remind a person of how you know him or her if it has been a while since you've talked. For example, you might reference a recent conference you both attended.
- ▶ **Don't be one-sided.** An "all-about-me" approach won't get you very far. LinkedIn and similar sites allow you to ask for help from members of your network quickly and easily, but don't abuse this privilege with constant requests. Also, don't forget to thank those who lend you a hand, and always look to return the favor.
- ▶ **Act quickly on requests.** Patience is a virtue, but not everyone possesses it. Respond to requests that come via your network promptly – within 24 hours, if possible.
- ▶ **Keep it professional.** Think twice before posting on LinkedIn, and don't post too often or on trivial subjects. Your aim should be to become a trusted authority rather than a social gadfly. That said, it's OK to share personal interests such as athletics and hobbies, as well as a profile picture so that others can begin to know you.
- ▶ **Make a big impact with small gestures.** Pay attention to what people are saying or working on. You can offer helpful suggestions, send useful articles or just leave comments, letting those in your network know they are heard and understood. You also can share insights and offer introductions to others. This may take you only 45 seconds of effort but could have a profound impact on the people with whom you wish to develop closer professional relationships.



Social Networking Sites, Including Facebook



To friend or not to friend? Social networking websites such as [Facebook](#) were initially designed as a way for individuals to connect with friends and family. Today, these tools are increasingly used for professional purposes, particularly in industries such as public relations and entertainment. But for individuals, online social interaction deserves careful thought before deciding to invite your professional contacts to join your friend list.

Many people attempt to keep their Facebook profiles away from the public eye, or create separate profiles for social and professional purposes. Others have decided their work and personal lives are so tightly linked that they have no reservations about friending colleagues as well as pals.

Just as you might share some details about your social life with a client over lunch, you may decide that connecting with colleagues on Facebook allows you to build closer relationships. Depending on your industry, you may even find that

Facebook is a useful way to develop relationships that may lead to new business.

Whatever your decision, it's important to understand the social networking "rules of the road." Even if you determine it's best to keep your personal and business profiles separate, you should know how to handle friend requests gracefully and the actions you can take to protect your privacy. And if you do combine your personal and professional lives, it's always wise to be thoughtful and considerate when

interacting in social communities. Here are a few tips:

- ▶ **Secure a vanity URL.** Your name may be more common than you think. A vanity URL will make it easier for people to find you. For instance, instead of a long, unwieldy user name, consider [facebook.com/yournameofchoice/](#). Include it in your e-mail signature file and on your business cards. (Visit Facebook to learn more about [usernames](#) and check their availability.)



- ▶ **Include a profile picture.** A picture is worth a thousand words. A personal photo adds legitimacy and confirms that you're the right "Mary Jones." The image you choose can be casual, but make sure it's professional.
- ▶ **Respect the wall.** If you wouldn't want to read it on a billboard, don't post it to your Facebook wall – or anyone else's. This holds true even if you use Facebook only to socialize. Remember, anyone you 'friend' can see your comments, photos and YouTube video links. E-mail or use Facebook's messaging feature instead.
- ▶ **Make the call.** Are you using Facebook for work or personal use? If you decide to friend coworkers, partners and customers, maintain full business acumen. Avoid posting what you ate today or what bar you are going to tonight for your business contacts to see.

Facebook Faux Pas: Don't Make Claims That Your Profile Doesn't Substantiate

A woman who called in to work claiming to be too sick to use her computer got caught updating her Facebook page the same day. She told her employer she was suffering from a migraine and needed to lie down in a dark room. The company said its discovery that she was using Facebook while home sick prompted them to lose trust in her and resulted in her permanent dismissal.

Source: "Ill' Worker Fired Over Facebook," BBC News



- ▶ **Keep it focused.** Likewise, resist the temptation to post updates about games, quizzes and groups to which you belong if you use Facebook for business. You'll muddy the waters and likely lose the interest of (or even annoy) individuals who want to know about your professional activities. Don't add new applications lightly! Some automatically post your activities on the general RSS feed. Do you really want all of your friends knowing every time you add a sheep to FarmVille? Probably not.
- ▶ **Avoid venting.** Big Brother really is watching, yet people continue to make the mistake of posting negative comments or gossiping about their employers, supervisors, colleagues, or any other touchy topic. Don't do it – chances are the wrong set of eyes will stumble upon your remarks. A better approach? Count to 10 and consider the consequences.
- ▶ **Ask before you tag.** Check with people before tagging them in photos, especially if you think they might not appreciate it, and don't tag someone else's photo with a business pitch unless you've asked permission. Remember to check your own photos periodically to make sure you haven't been tagged in one you may not want to be associated with; Facebook has settings that allow you to receive an alert anytime you have been tagged in a photo.
- ▶ **Please, don't poke.** Your friends may get a kick out of your “nudges,” but it can be interpreted as flirting. Use this feature for personal interactions only. It's never appropriate for professional purposes.



- ▶ **Take 'no' for an answer.** When trying to friend someone, once is enough. There's no need to bombard the person with repeated requests. At the same time, keep in mind that some people may not want to connect with you, including your boss or coworkers. Try not to take it personally; people use different criteria for building their online social networks, or they may not be regular Facebook users.
- ▶ **Keep it private.** It's likely you'll find coworkers or other business contacts on Facebook, and not all of them will use the site in a professional way. Respect their privacy, and don't turn their posts into fodder for office gossip.

Thinking About 'Friending' Your Boss on Facebook?

Executives were asked, "How comfortable would you feel about being 'friended' by the following individuals on Facebook?" Their responses:

	Your boss	Your coworkers	People you manage	Clients	Vendors
Very Comfortable	15%	10%	10%	6%	5%
Somewhat Comfortable	23%	37%	27%	27%	17%
Not Very Comfortable	17%	15%	18%	21%	25%
Not Comfortable at All	38%	32%	39%	39%	47%
Don't Know	7%	6%	6%	7%	6%

Source: Robert Half survey of 249 senior executives at the largest companies in the United States and Canada

Twitter



Although you may not know what “twibes” are, most people have used or at least heard of Twitter since it launched in 2006. (FYI: A “twibe” is a group of Twitter users interested in a common topic.) Twitter is perhaps the least understood of all the major social media services. How do you find meaningful information in a stream of tweets? What does RT stand for? And what’s a Fail Whale? The following tips can help you interact with the “Twitterverse” (Twitter universe) in a professional manner when exploring this real-time information network:

- ▶ **Introduce yourself.** Twitter is not a place for a curriculum vitae. In your biography, you have a limited number of characters to explain what you do and what followers can expect from your feed. This makes it easy for people to decide whether to follow you.
- ▶ **Start by listening.** Use Twitter’s search function to find feeds that interest you, and then spend some time learning how people in your industry use the platform. Tools like [CoTweet](#), [HootSuite](#) and [TweetDeck](#) allow you to create saved search terms to track topics of interest.
- ▶ **Be human when tweeting.** It’s important to use a human voice. Keep your tone real and natural.
- ▶ **Add value.** What distinct value do you offer your followers? Be helpful and generous. Share links to relevant articles or online resources. Tweet out information your followers can use, not irrelevant details.
- ▶ **Tweet regularly.** Keep your profile current by posting information on a regular basis – a few times a day, if possible, or as often as seems natural. It only takes a few minutes, and it will help you connect with others who share the same interests. Remember, tweeting is not about a number, and it shouldn’t feel forced.
- ▶ **Pay it forward.** Retweeting others’ posts helps you build rapport with followers, encourage discussion and show people that it’s not all about you – others have pertinent things to say, too!



- ▶ **Offer thanks.** Acknowledge retweets by publicly thanking the people who shared your information. But don't go overboard – it clutters your followers' streams. Consider a direct message (DM) instead.
- ▶ **Keep it light.** You only have 140 characters to make a statement, so don't write in too formal a fashion. Consider using fewer than 140 characters to make it easier for others to retweet your posts.
- ▶ **Be open.** Twitter offers a [privacy](#) feature, and, while it's subject to change from time to time, 90 percent of users don't enable it. Open accounts encourage the most listening, learning and sharing, so think twice before locking an account you use for business. You can easily block individual accounts, if necessary.
- ▶ **But don't be *too* open.** Because of the space limitations, Twitter is not the best place to resolve sticky dilemmas. For sensitive issues, use the DM feature.
- ▶ **Think before you tweet.** When using Twitter for business, keep it PG-rated. Avoid posting any information about controversial topics or sharing sensitive information – you could get into hot water.
- ▶ **Connect your LinkedIn and Twitter accounts.** You can display select tweets in your LinkedIn profile by using the hash tag #in within your Twitter post. It's a way to gain more traction, further build your reputation and establish yourself as a go-to person, as long as you follow Twitter best practices and use a light hand. It can be annoying when all of a person's tweets indiscriminately show up via LinkedIn.

Social Networking Lessons From the Fatty Paycheck

It's undeniable that one tweet can set off a firestorm, or, in some cases, get you fired. A job candidate was offered a position by Cisco Systems, Inc., but her angst about the opportunity led her to tweet the pros and cons. Someone claiming to be a Cisco employee saw the tweet and responded:

“Cisco just offered me a job! Now I have to weigh the utility of a fatty paycheck against the daily commute to San Jose and hating the work.”

– via Twitter

“Who is the hiring manager? I'm sure they would love to know that you will hate the work. We here at Cisco are versed in the web.”

– via Twitter

Sources: “A Guide to Protecting Your Online Identity,” Mashable; “Social Networking and Your Job: Lessons From the ‘Cisco Fatty,’” Excele, A Monster Community



5 Questions to Ask Yourself About Social and Professional Networking Sites



Overwhelmed by all of the social media possibilities? Don't worry – you don't have to do it all. Use the following questions to help you determine the best medium for your message:

1

What's your primary goal?

Do you want to connect with friends, business contacts or both? Are you looking to build your professional reputation, relocate to a new city, find a new job, or stay up-to-date on industry news? Knowing your main objective can help you identify the best social networking tool for your needs.

2

Which sites do the people you want to connect with use?

LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter offer the opportunity to reach a wide audience, but they are used for different purposes and in different contexts. Determine the audience you wish to reach and find out which sites they use and what communication style they prefer.

3

What's your strategy?

Decide how much time you're willing to invest, and then choose specific tasks that will help you achieve your goals. You may decide to join five new LinkedIn groups, follow 10 new people on Twitter each month, or network on Facebook for a set amount of time each day. Change your approach to find out what works best for you. Investing just a few minutes a day can help you manage your time and pay significant returns.

4

What can you offer that's different from others?

If you're an expert in your field or just well versed on a particular topic, you can share your knowledge with others. Provide links to relevant articles or videos. Ideally, you can offer insights on industry trends or share some unique expertise of your own.

5

How will you monitor your progress?

The more you participate in your network, the more you'll gain from it. But don't get hung up on the numbers. There are many ways to get more "followers," but those large follower or friend numbers don't necessarily mean you're getting more from your network. Instead, focus on the value of the new relationships you're developing. You'll see a much higher return if you focus on quality versus quantity.

Who's Searching Whom?

- **44%** of adults who are online have searched for information about someone whose services or advice they seek in a professional capacity.
- **31%** of employed Internet users have searched online for information about coworkers, professional colleagues or business competitors, up from 23 percent in 2006.

Who's Sharing What?

- **65%** of adult social networking users have changed the privacy settings on their profile to limit what they share with others online.
- **27%** of employed Internet users now work for an employer that has policies about how they present themselves online – such as what they can post on blogs and websites, or what information they can share about themselves.

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project, A Project of the Pew Research Center, "Reputation Management and Social Media," by Mary Madden and Aaron Smith, May 26, 2010



E-mail



Although most professionals are well versed in using e-mail, many still struggle with the finer points. It's commonly known that typing in all CAPS is equivalent to “cybershouting” – but here are some other protocol points to consider:

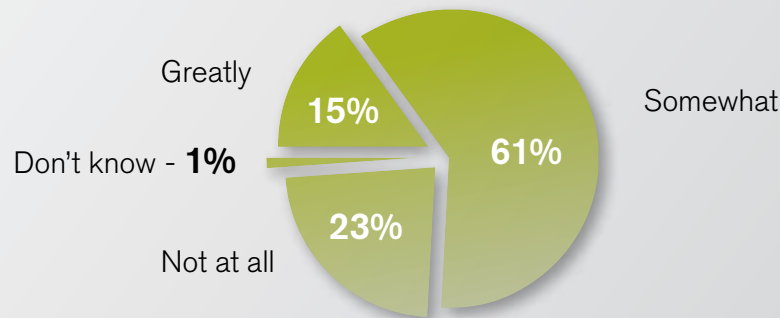
- ▶ **Be kind.** Don't use e-mail to say no, argue, criticize or deliver bad news. Pick up the phone or deliver the information face to face.
- ▶ **Make every e-mail fight for its right to be sent.** The less you send, the more likely your messages will be read. Don't copy others unless they really need to read it.
- ▶ **Be considerate, not cryptic.** Don't expect others to decipher what you mean by reviewing an entire e-mail thread. Just because you are on the go doesn't mean you should expect others to piece together what's being requested.
- ▶ **Use only one account for work.** Keep work-related e-mails coming and going from your work account only. Having a single address makes it easy for people to find your messages. And it will prevent business messages from getting tangled with your personal e-mail – and perhaps neglected as a result.
- ▶ **Consider your e-mail account when job hunting.** It may go without saying, but don't use your current work e-mail to send resumes to prospective employers. Also, avoid using overly personal e-mail handles when job hunting, such as “partyanimal@____.com.” Not everyone will appreciate your sense of humor and “too much information” can be a turn-off.
- ▶ **Respond in a timely manner.** Try to respond to all messages within 24 hours, but don't say you'll reply with a more detailed response at a later date unless you really intend to follow through. If you're in consecutive meetings or away from the office, put an out-of-office message on so people aren't left wondering when you'll get back to them.
- ▶ **Be crystal clear.** In your subject line (and you should always have one!), explain what you want: Do you need someone to review or approve something, or is the message simply an FYI? In the message itself, get to the point and use bullets, which are easier to scan than large blocks of text.



- ▶ **Don't get too fancy.** Avoid bright colors, odd fonts or extra-long signature lines. Some people find these distracting or just plain annoying. Include your personal or business links to social and professional networking sites when appropriate.
- ▶ **Watch the size.** An e-mail with a mega-attachment might never reach its recipient, and if it does, it could overload the inbox. Consider zipping the file or utilizing a service like [YouSendIt](#) that allows you to transmit large files over the Internet. (Be sure to check your company's IT policy first.)
- ▶ **Don't cry wolf.** Is it really urgent or are you simply feeling impatient? Resist the temptation to flag your messages with a big red exclamation point when they're really not that time sensitive. The result of doing so constantly? People simply will stop paying attention.
- ▶ **Reply with care.** When responding to an e-mail with multiple recipients, think twice about whether you really need to reply to all, and double-check your response before doing so. Bad "Reply to All" threads run rampant throughout organizations.
- ▶ **Think before you send.** Always review the distribution list when sending a sensitive message. Many a message has erroneously been sent to the wrong person with disastrous consequences.

Are Tech Etiquette Breaches a Career Killer?

Executives were asked, **"To what extent, if any, can technology etiquette breaches, for example, sending e-mail messages to unintended recipients, checking e-mail on a BlackBerry during meetings, etc., adversely affect a person's career prospects?"** Their responses:

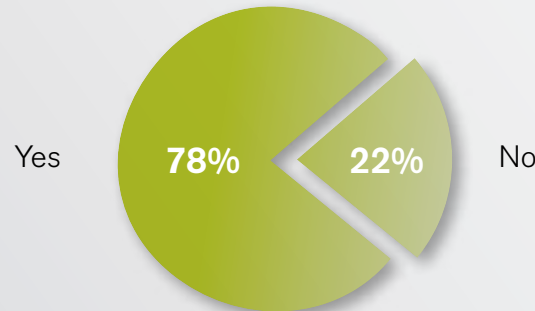


Source: Robert Half survey of 659 human resources managers in the United States and Canada



E-mail Mistakes on the Job

Executives were asked, **“Have you ever mistakenly e-mailed someone the wrong message or copied someone on a message without intending to?”** Their responses:



Source: Robert Half survey of 250 advertising and marketing executives in the United States

Among the Most Embarrassing Blunders Reported Were the Following:

- “Someone sent out confidential salary information to the whole firm.”
- “An employee sent his resume to me by mistake. It was supposed to go to an outside company.”
- “Someone made a nasty comment about a supervisor and it was sent to the supervisor by mistake. It eventually led to dismissal.”
- “I once sent a job offer to the wrong person.”
- “A person called another employee an idiot in an e-mail to everyone in the company.”
- “My receptionist sent a very gossipy and catty e-mail about another employee to the wrong person. It was so unprofessional that she was terminated.”
- “We sent an e-mail to a client that was meant for a vendor. It made it difficult when the client had seen our costs.”
- “Confidential information about one client was sent to a different client. It was certainly embarrassing.”
- “Someone crafted a scathing, sarcastic e-mail about a customer and did not mean to hit ‘send.’ It caused problems.”

Instant Messaging



Could it be the “instant” in instant messaging that makes this form of online chat so appealing? It isn't used in every office, but it is becoming more common as a business communication tool. One of the reasons its popularity is growing is because it allows you to send and receive messages so quickly. But before sending your next IM, make sure you follow these etiquette rules:

▶ **Be unassuming.** When using this medium, remember that your colleagues have their own schedules and deadlines. Don't assume a coworker is available just because the person's IM status indicates he or she is logged on. Your colleague may have forgotten to change the status to “busy” or could simply prefer to concentrate on a different task for the time being.

▶ **Restrain yourself.** IMs can be distracting because they often pop up in front of other open computer windows and are usually accompanied by a noise trumpeting their arrival. Don't overdo it.

▶ **Keep it short and sweet.** A good rule of thumb is to consider the length of a “tweet” for your instant messages. IMs are best for quick back-and-forth conversations; many IM programs even limit the amount of text. If you're approaching that limit, it's a sign that you need to switch to e-mail.

And if your overall exchange is taking up too much time or text, a phone call or in-person meeting can yield quicker results.

▶ **Avoid pop-ups.** There's a time and place for IMs, but not during meetings. Remember to log out of your chat feature before presenting in a meeting using your computer or laptop. Constant IMs popping up, especially if they aren't business-related, can be distracting.



- ▶ **Exercise caution.** People frequently use IM at work, but it's easy to send a message to someone you didn't intend to contact – particularly when chatting with multiple people at once. When in doubt about the appropriate use of IM at work, check your company's policy.
- ▶ **Watch your tone.** Attempts at humor or sarcasm can fall flat or be misinterpreted in an IM. Make sure you are familiar with the recipient's sense of humor before attempting to be funny. Using emoticons can indicate a more lighthearted message, but when used excessively, they can come off as unprofessional. When in doubt, be straightforward.
- ▶ **Go with the flow.** After a 10-minute IM exchange with your manager, he writes, "Back to my work" and ends the conversation. Don't take offense at his brevity or perceived tone. Because IM involves quick volleys of conversation, it's easy to appear abrupt or rude when no offense is meant.
- ▶ **Be responsive, not dormant.** When chatting on IM, return your reply in a timely fashion. Try to respond to the other person within a few minutes and generally not longer than five minutes. If you are going to be away from your computer temporarily but wish to continue your IM exchange, tell the other person you will BRB (be right back).
- ▶ **Sign off properly.** There's nothing more frustrating than having a five-minute IM conversation that ends with someone waiting for a final response. Let the person on the other end know if you must curtail a chat session. It's nice to offer a short reason why you are signing off, such as a scheduled call, or simply a "TTYL" (talk to you later).



Mobile Devices



Mobile devices such as BlackBerrys, Droids and iPods are pervasive, but others can take offense when they're always turned on. As new products are released and these tools become even more ubiquitous, it pays to understand proper workplace decorum. Here's some advice:

- ▶ **Take a break.** Give your colleagues the courtesy of keeping your devices out of sight during meetings. Constantly checking and texting tells others that your focus is elsewhere, and it could snowball – when one person uses a device, other people will think it's OK and start using theirs. Step out if you need to respond to an urgent message or make a call.
- ▶ **Turn it off.** Are you guilty of a loud ringtone, or a phone vibrating on the conference table? Both will annoy coworkers during a meeting. So, when in doubt, turn it off completely. If you need to be reachable, set the phone to vibrate and keep it in your pocket or bag to muffle the sound.
- ▶ **Know your location.** Unless you work in TV, you don't want to be known as the "broadcaster." Too often, conversations that should be confined behind closed doors take place in coffee shops, grocery store lines, airport gates and even restrooms. Would you have the conversation if the guy behind you in line worked for the competition or was related to one of your company's executives? Make – and take – sensitive calls from a private place.
- ▶ **Disconnect the Bluetooth.** Always being plugged in doesn't necessarily make you look indispensable, but it may give you the nickname "cyborg." Your "always accessible" demeanor may imply that you can't give your full attention to the matter right in front of you.
- ▶ **Distinguish between 911 and 411.** Think about it. Can your question or request wait? If a colleague provides a cell phone number to use in emergencies, honor that request. What's urgent for you might not be so for the company or your contact, so ask yourself honestly: Is this a 911 or a 411 issue?



- ▶ **Text selectively.** Texting a colleague is helpful when sending directions to a lunch meeting or letting the person know you're running late. But it's not the tool for meaningful dialogue.
- ▶ **Identify yourself.** Don't assume your recipients have your contact information programmed into their

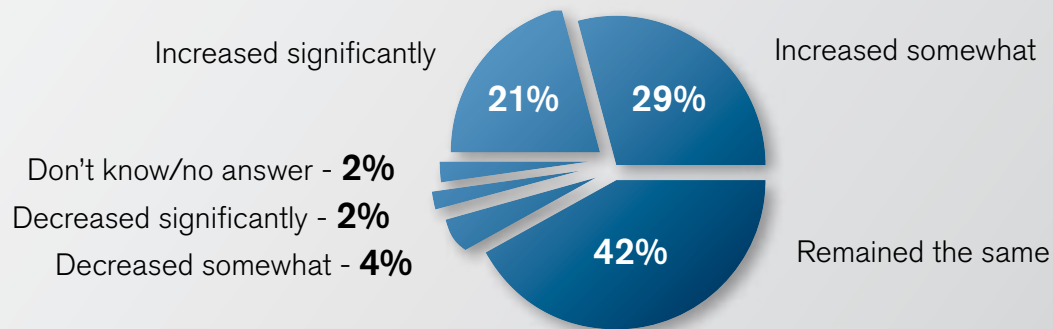
phone. If you text coworkers, be sure to identify yourself.

- ▶ **Go light on the text speak.** Cryptic code, such as AFC (away from computer) or CYE (check your e-mail) makes texting shorthand a whole new language, but not everyone is fluent. Don't send

messages full of confusing acronyms and abbreviations. Though perfection is not always necessary when texting, remember to remain professional.

Tech Etiquette Outlaws: Are You One of Them?

Chief information officers were asked, **“In your opinion, has the increased use of mobile electronic gadgets – such as cell phones, smartphones, handheld devices and laptops – increased or decreased the number of breaches in workplace etiquette in the past three years?”** Their responses:



Source: Robert Half survey of 1,718 chief information officers in the United States and Canada

Phone, Video and Web Conferencing



No doubt about it, today's technology can make distance irrelevant. As the workforce becomes more dispersed and companies recognize the cost savings of connecting remotely, phone, video and web conferencing – and especially, applications like Skype – are growing in popularity. It can be difficult, however, to know how to interact with colleagues and business contacts who are in different locations. Follow these tips to stay on the up-and-up:

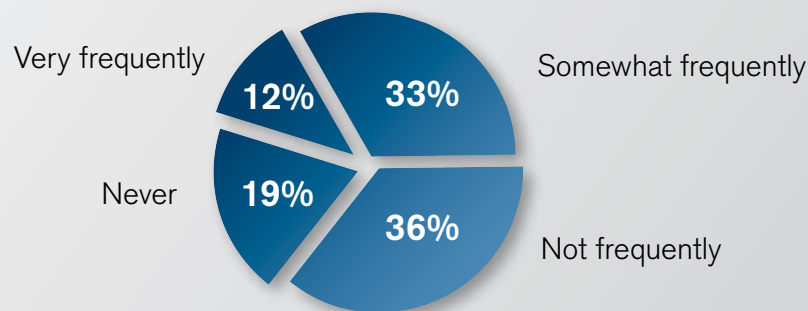
- ▶ **Take a trial run.** Know how to use the conferencing technology prior to scheduling a meeting. If you're not familiar with the video screen, web-hosting software, webcam or telephone features, plan a practice run so you can troubleshoot issues without wasting others' time.
- ▶ **Watch the clock.** Would your colleagues in Asia appreciate a conference call at 3 a.m. their time? When scheduling a meeting that involves individuals from several locations, keep their local times in mind. Websites such as timeanddate.com can help you decipher time zones. Avoid hosting a meeting very early, late or during lunch, if possible.
- ▶ **Get the team ready.** In advance of a conference call, give attendees what they'll need for the meeting – dial-in number, pass code, login information and attachments (e.g., presentations, sales reports). If you want them to review the materials in advance, say so. Include a brief agenda so people can come prepared with some thoughts instead of coming in cold.
- ▶ **Be a good host.** Here's your chance to show your true skills as a facilitator. If you're leading the call, make appropriate introductions before giving a brief overview. Keep the discussion moving and have an eye on the clock so you can leave a few minutes at the end to address questions, recap, and confirm next steps and deadlines.



- ▶ **Be inclusive.** Out of sight shouldn't mean out of mind. If part of the group is meeting in person, don't forget about those joining via phone or online. Ask them for their thoughts if they seem quiet.
- ▶ **Make the introduction.** You may think your voice is distinctive, but it's not always easy to tell who's talking. Encourage everyone to introduce themselves before they speak. Also, be sure to acknowledge someone who joins midway through the call.
- ▶ **Enjoy the silence.** It can be a virtue, and who enjoys being interrupted? In virtual meetings, it can be difficult to determine whose turn it is to speak. A lag in the connection may also cause a delayed response. Allow for pauses in the conversation so everyone can weigh in and catch up.
- ▶ **Pay attention.** Don't get caught daydreaming. It's easy to let your mind wander during a remote meeting, or you may begin to multitask if you're not being directly addressed.
- ▶ **Don't put people on hold.** More than one conference has ended prematurely because on-hold music has prevented the conversation from proceeding. Remind attendees at the beginning of the meeting to hang up if they must attend to something else.
- ▶ **Use mute.** It's just common courtesy to limit distracting background noises when you're listening to others. Remember to turn your mute button off before it's your turn to speak.

Conference Call Culprits

Executives were asked, **“When you participate in meetings via teleconference, how frequently do you do other things, like answer e-mail or surf the Internet, during the meeting?”** Their responses:



Source: Robert Half survey of 763 advertising and marketing executives in the United States and Canada

Sticky Etiquette Questions



Occasionally we all come across situations in which we wonder, “Would Miss Manners approve?” But in the digital age of social networking, the etiquette lines can become even blurrier. Following are some common sticky etiquette questions and tips to help tackle them:

Should I personalize my LinkedIn requests to connect with others?

It's perfectly fine to use the form letter, even when connecting with close contacts. But if you wish to connect to someone you haven't seen in a while, take the time to personalize the message.

What's the right way to decline a request to connect with someone?

No response at all might be your best bet. Don't feel pressured to connect with someone you would rather not form a relationship with, and don't feel the need to explain your decision. Simply click “Ignore.”

Should I friend my boss or coworkers?

This is the \$64,000 question, and those on the receiving end may provide the answer. (See “[Thinking About 'Friending' Your Boss on Facebook?](#)” on Page 10.) If you do connect, utilize privacy settings and different friend lists to control how – and with whom – you share content. Be sensitive to how engaged your company is in digital networking.

If someone follows me on Twitter, should I follow him or her back?

No, because you may end up unfollowing the person later. Before following people, check out their feed, bio and previous tweets to get

a sense of them or their organization, and determine if you'll be interested in seeing the kind of content they share. Although it's considered good etiquette to follow someone back, don't do it indiscriminately. It's your feed, and you want to make it valuable to you.

Uh oh. I sent a confidential e-mail to the wrong person. What do I do now?

First, try to use the recall function if your e-mail program offers this option. If this step doesn't solve the problem, contact those who are affected, and explain your error and whether you need their help correcting it. You also may need to inform your manager of the mistake.

For more sticky situations, visit roberthalf.us/BusinessEtiquette.



Conclusion



Social media and other technology tools have created new forums for connecting, sharing and, unfortunately, blundering. Workplace controversies have ensued, but we can learn from our own and others' missteps. The occasional "oops" is inevitable when using a new device or becoming accustomed to an emerging online platform. When that happens, rectify mistakes as soon as possible, apologize to those who may have been affected and forgive others when they make gaffes. Putting yourself in someone else's shoes and forgiving quickly could indeed be the best etiquette lesson of all.

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