



# Unwritten Rules for Success on the Job

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**IT IS CONVENIENT** when all the rules are laid out for us. However, there are many rules that companies simply expect you to know. As an employee, there are unwritten rules to follow in the workplace. You may be wondering, what are these rules? The norms of the work environment can vary from place to place, but here are some guidelines to follow that may help you reach your goals and stand out as a great employee. Though they may seem obvious, you may find that they will challenge you on the job.

## **ASK (GOOD) QUESTIONS**

Don't be afraid to ask questions, especially if you are new on the job. It's better to ask someone than make mistakes right off the bat. No one is perfect and it will be common to make mistakes but try to minimize them and provide quality work by asking for help. However, if your supervisor gives you a packet to read, you don't read it, and then you ask about something that was clearly stated in the packet, this might irritate your supervisor. Be resourceful and seek out simple solutions to see if YOU know the answer before asking someone. There will be moments where you'll have to figure it out on your own.

## **HAVE A POSITIVE ATTITUDE**

If you want to be successful, you will want to develop a positive attitude. This goes for more than just your job. It's important that you value yourself and believe in yourself if you want to lead

a life of success. Developing a positive mindset not only helps you be successful, but also influences those around you and improves the work environment.

## **BUILD RELATIONSHIPS**

You may be familiar with the song *High School Never Ends* by Bowling for Soup, and that can be very true in some work environments. Drama and gossip have not disappeared and will try to creep back into your life at the workplace. Avoid it and do your best to not become involved. Spread good things about people and try to bring them up. Say positive things to people to help build relationships. Be helpful and kind in every situation and show respect to others. When the time comes, mentor others when they need help because someone else will probably do the same for you. Building a network of people who respect you can be very powerful in leading you to success.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA PROFESSIONALISM**

Social media plays a huge role in not only our leisure time, but also at work. There are many stories about employees who get fired or even potential employees that don't ever get hired because of their social media profiles. It's important to keep certain things in life private. Privacy settings on social media accounts don't truly mean they are private. With proper connections, almost anyone can see your posts and word gets around fast.

Refrain from speaking poorly about work, co-workers, and even your boss on social media.

They say a picture is worth a thousand words and for your boss, it can mean one: fired. Don't post photos that are inappropriate for the workplace. Some work environments might not care about your social media posts, but it's better to be safe than sorry. Maintaining professionalism also helps you build a better reputation if you were to ever switch jobs or positions.

## **LISTEN AND BE COACHABLE**

Your mentors, supervisors and co-workers might know a thing or two about the job. Be willing to listen to others and learn from them. Be sure to engage in conversation to let people know you are listening. Don't decide to pull out your phone like you might do to your friends in the middle of a conversation. Put down the distractions and show you care about the people teaching you. Acknowledge others, thank them for their time, and respect them for helping you. If you are a poor listener and not a coachable person, it makes it difficult for people to be willing to work with you.

## **THE THREE P'S**

Be Proactive, Prepared, and Productive. Yes, college helps prepare us for the workforce, but work is not class. Sleeping, showing up late, not showing up at all or being incredibly distracted must be put in the past. Procrastinating,

avoiding work, and just being unproductive overall will not help you advance in your career. To be proactive, you don't have to overwhelm yourself with work, but take on a good amount of duties, hold yourself accountable and stay disciplined to get tasks done on time. To be prepared, start by showing up on time and bring materials you may need for the task. Lastly, if you want to be productive, you might want to ditch the phone. Utilizing Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, etc. might be a big distraction to your work. If someone sees you sitting on your phone, they may instantly think you are slacking.

### CONFRONT PROPERLY

Conflict will occur in the workplace. However, conflict can be healthy and constructive if handled properly. In the book *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, Patrick Lencioni explains how fear of conflict is a major dysfunction. Relationships with your co-workers will require productive conflict to be successful. When confronting others, be sure to have private conversations and be respectful. Remember, to help solve an issue with someone, it is best to talk to that specific person to solve the problem instead of spreading gossip around the office. This only creates a negative work environment.

### IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT YOU

Don't be self-centered and look for all the attention. Instead, take an interest in others. Focus on giving not receiving. Take the time to learn about other people and make a difference in other's work. Especially, take the extra time to learn the names of your co-workers and be careful to not spell their names wrong and start off with a bad first impression. The little things truly do count.



### An Employer's Perspective

Rachael Powell, Data Analyst,  
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#### RACHAEL'S "DO'S AND DON'TS"

- **Do** be respectful of everyone, like the old saying: "you should treat the CEO and the janitor with the same respect."
- **Do** respect other's differences and backgrounds. Experiences of others make the organization stronger.
- **Do** be willing to try new processes. The phrase, "that's the way we've always done it," can make you seem stale.
- **Don't** be critical of others in front of the group. No one likes to be called out in front of their peers. If you have an issue, talk to the person in private.
- **Don't** do your job only. Saying "that's not my job" isn't helpful for anyone.
- **Don't** blame others for your failures. Own up if you've made a mistake and find a way to fix the situation.

#### MOST IMPORTANT RULE TODAY:

Have a positive attitude. No one wants to work with someone that is always negative.

#### MOST COMMON RULE BROKEN:

Staying inside your box. If you need to work with another department for a task, don't be afraid to engage and work together. Learn as much as you can about their department because it will increase your understanding of the company as a whole.

#### IS IT OKAY TO BREAK A RULE?

Breaking an unwritten rule could mean going above and beyond the status quo, and that is never a bad thing.



### A Professor's Perspective

Kelly Schultz, Professor &  
Advisor, Iowa State University

#### MOST IMPORTANT RULE TODAY:

It is a toss-up between self-sufficiency and being a kind and genuine person. Self-sufficiency is an important rule especially for a college student because ultimately, it's up to the student to decide what they want to get out of the education they are paying for. Being kind is typically correlated with so many other good traits including being a good listener, respectful, positive and cognizant which is critical in everyday encounters. My all-time favorite quote is, "If you work really hard and are kind, amazing things will happen."

#### RULES OFTEN BROKEN IN CLASS:

- On social media during class
- Being late/leaving early
- Not attending
- Sleeping!
- Not participating or asking questions

#### MOST COMMON RULE BROKEN:

Losing drive, which goes back to one of my most important rules of being self-sufficient. Students will typically start out the semester motivated and eager to learn; however, it takes real self-motivation and discipline to continue even when things start to increase in rigor and balancing life becomes harder.

#### IS IT OKAY TO BREAK A RULE?

Absolutely. Sometimes, when a rule is broken, greater things may come from it. The rules are there to provide a clear foundation and structure, but it is also important to be flexible.