Virtual Office Etiquette: 10 Common Sense Tips

Exercising professional courtesies is necessary for dispersed teams. In this article, we outline 10 virtual office etiquette tips that are common sense solutions for maintaining positive remote work relationships.

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One of the many benefits of telecommuting is the freedom to work where you wish. However, whether you work in your home, a co-working space, or a coffee shop, working offsite can give rise to a whole new set of issues when relating to your virtual office employees, co-workers, and managers. Just like working onsite, when working from home you should be aware of professional norms and adhere to basic office etiquette.

Following some basic rules of courtesy, consideration, and respect can go a long way to ensure productive and harmonious remote working relationships. Here are 10 common sense tips to help you maneuver the potential pitfalls that come with working in a virtual office.

1. Pick the Appropriate Method of Communication

With the plethora of communication apps and technology available, it can be tricky to determine the best way to reach out to a colleague, client, or boss. It's best to keep it simple and choose the most appropriate communication method to relay your message and convey sound virtual office etiquette.

For example, do you need to provide detailed information? Be mindful of your recipient's time and send the information via email. This method allows the recipient to print the information for reference later while also giving you the space to provide all the information required. Remember to always keep emails professional, proofread your messages, and be concise.

Alternatively, do you have to relay an urgent message or need a quick response to a time-sensitive question? Avoid an endless chain of back and forth emails and pick up the telephone. Sometimes a well-placed phone call can save a lot of time and energy. Even if the call is not answered, you can avoid miscommunication by leaving a detailed message in an appropriate tone of voice.

2. Trust Your Colleagues and Staff

Do you dislike the feeling of someone constantly looking over your shoulder? Are you relieved that working remotely has delivered you from this uncomfortable fate? The members of your virtual team probably feel the same way. If you shoot off emails every hour for a project status or demand to know what your staff or colleagues are doing every second of the day, consider taking a virtual office etiquette cue to step back and allow people to do their jobs.

When dealing with professionals with experience working in a virtual office, remember that each person has established their own workflow. Set a deadline or schedule a status email around the midpoint of a project. Focus on goals and accomplishments instead of employee activity. If the work gets done and deadlines are met, it shouldn't matter if your remote teammates don't work at the same speed or the same hours as you do.

3. Be Mindful of Time Zones

A virtual office means that employees and business owners can work remotely while simply being connected via the internet. With the rise of a global workforce and the popularity of the digital nomad lifestyle, the odds that your boss or colleagues don't work in the same time zone have increased exponentially.

When deadlines roll around or if you have questions regarding an assignment, it can be tempting to expect an immediate response to a message or email. Keep in mind that different time zones will affect everything from response times to meeting availability. What may be a normal or reasonable hour in your time zone, may not be for your staff or remote team members.

This is where tools such as World Time Buddy can come in handy. This application can simultaneously compare the time zones across multiple locations. While scheduling staff for a virtual noon meeting in Los Angeles may seem reasonable, remember that if you are a U.S. based company and have a global workforce, your UK- or European-based team would most likely not be able to join because it would be late in the evening there.

To ensure everyone gets to participate in company meetings during regular business hours, consider shifting the schedule around during different time zones and provide the option of downloading a recording or transcript of the virtual meeting for remote workers unable to attend because of scheduling conflicts.

4. Don't Brag

Are you one of the lucky few working comfortably from home in your pajamas or while traveling in the Bahamas? If you get the opportunity, fantastic! But remember that everyone doesn't have this luxury. If you are a partial telecommuter, or one of the few remote staff members who have been able to transition to a permanent virtual office, your colleagues might end up resenting your fabulous telecommuting lifestyle.

Keeping your colleagues updated on your travels is great, but constantly bragging about how much better your life is now you're not trapped in the office might be offputting to your colleagues.

5. Be Sensitive to Cultural Differences

Although it's easy to fall into casual conversation when communicating with remote colleagues, it is important to consider today's global workforce and remember that what may be a lighthearted joke in one area of the world can be considered an insult in another.

> *Taking the time to learn a bit about the cultural background, language, and traditions of clients, managers, and peers can alleviate tension and hurt feelings down the road.*

Since major religious holidays or cultural events in other countries have the potential to affect productivity, it is vital to ensure all team members are aware of any scheduling restrictions. It also may be old-fashioned, but to be safe, when first joining a global workforce it is best to avoid discussing controversial topics, especially religion,

politics, or sex, with international colleagues until you are more familiar with your peers and have familiarized yourself with the company culture.

[For digital nomads or companies with a large global workforce, culture shock can be a real thing](). Spending some time learning about the social norms of your peers can help mitigate communication issues and build effective working relationships.

6. Do Unto Others...

In a virtual office environment, you can sometimes feel like you're the only one around. However, it is important to be considerate of your co-workers, staff, and supervisors by ensuring you are accessible. This doesn't mean you must be online 24 hours a day, seven days a week. But practicing good virtual office etiquette does mean you should ensure you communicate your hours of availability or set aside some designated time to be available for feedback or questions.

When a colleague or client sends you an email or text or takes the time to call you, virtual office etiquette dictates that you respond in a polite way. Don't 'ghost' your peers. Nothing can be more disruptive to virtual collaboration than a disappearing remote worker who refuses to respond to communication attempts.

If the company uses work communication and productivity software programs, verify that all staff members are familiar with tools to help them get instant feedback or enable them to interact with technical support as needed.

7. Be Clear When Communicating Expectations

Remote workers should remember that unless they are solopreneurs, they do not make significant decisions all on their own. No matter how brilliant a new idea is, it is best not to make last-minute decisions that can change the scope of a project or impact the team workflow. Everyone knows there is no "I" in team and collaboration with other company staff is vital.

Collaborative software programs can be invaluable tools in getting virtual team members on the same page. Here are some commonly used options that companies can consider incorporating into their company workflow:

- Basecamp
- Slack
- Trello
- Wrike
- Zoho Projects
- Google Drive

Collaboration is difficult enough with a remote workforce. According [to the 2019 State of Remote Work report,]() 17% of remote workers struggle with collaboration and communication while working remotely. By encouraging remote staff to communicate with each other and using collaboration software, companies can help maintain and improve productivity.

Bonus Remote Management Tip: When managing remote workers, be clear with expectations. It is important to let remote staff know exactly what is expected of them productivity-wise, and provide the resources necessary to complete their jobs effectively. Assign responsibilities from day one, set milestones and priorities, and clearly discuss the final outcomes of the project or assignment. Delegate project leaders, and set a hierarchy to allow for potential shifts in project scope.

8. Don't Rock the Boat

If telecommuting is a perk and not the norm in your company, remember that it would behoove you to not cause issues or make unreasonable demands. Virtual office etiquette means not asking for special privileges that are not extended to other remote workers.

A Stanford study conducted by Bloom, Liang, Roberts, and Ying shows that working from a virtual office helps increase productivity up to 13% and ultimately saves the company money. However, if your productivity levels drop or you over-promise and under-deliver, this won't convince your boss to let you work from home more. Instead, it may signal to your boss that you are replaceable.

If your boss requires all staff to work onsite one or two days a week, don't be the one person demanding to be excused from that requirement. Calling in sick or scheduling paid-time off when you need to be present is unprofessional and may lead the company to revoke your telecommuting arrangement.

Don't be *that person*. Don't be the one remote worker that sours your boss on telecommuting and ruins the benefit for everyone else.

9. Never Forget You Are a Working Professional

One of the perks of having a virtual office is that unless you are in a co-working space or a coffee shop, you are usually the only one in the room. Hence, pajamas and casual wear tends to be the daily wardrobe of choice for telecommuters. However, there are times where dressing the part of a working professional is necessary.

An example is participating in video conference calls with your peers or prospective clients. Since first impressions and professionalism are always important, you can demonstrate good home office etiquette by making sure you look presentable and alert during video calls. Also, be mindful of your body language and facial expressions. If you have an early morning video meeting, ensure you are fully awake before appearing on camera.

Although most video communication focuses on the upper half of your body, be mindful that your outfit appropriately covers your bottom half as well. You never know when you might have to stand up and walk away from your desk mid-video call.

Finally, don't eat during the meeting. There is nothing more distracting than someone chewing, gulping, and slurping during a conference call.

10. Don't Waste Others' Time

Working in a virtual office means you can no longer blame tardiness on traffic delays, so don't be late for scheduled conference calls or virtual meetings. This poor virtual office etiquette disrupts everyone's schedule while they wait for you to join the meeting.

Prior to your calls or virtual meetings, check your equipment and learn how to operate new software or tools. Eliminate distractions by closing windows, turning off the television or stereo, and locking doors to reduce the likelihood of interruptions.

Be prepared with talking points and stick to the agenda. Derailing a meeting while you search for information or engage in small-talk is not only unprofessional but also shows a lack of disrespect for everyone else's time.

Which of these virtual office etiquette tips resonated with you? Is there room for improvement? Connect with Virtual Vocations on *Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn to tell us. We'd love to hear from you!*

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