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smart **Advice for Success!** **Business**™ matters

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Keeping up appearances:

How to make your point with style and win points with customers

Would you take financial advice from an accountant with many visible tattoos? Entrust your life to a surgeon who couldn't look you in the eye? Take flying lessons with an instructor known for a hair-trigger temper?

Probably not. These rather extreme descriptions show that how we look, speak and dress determine how we are perceived.

Yet take a look around almost any workplace, and you might conclude that managers spend more time packaging products, designing signs and arranging window displays than "packaging" their most important assets: themselves and their employees. Read on for advice on ways you and your team can make a better impression, build confidence and, in the process, boost the bottom line.



No loose threads: Casual dress codes can be professional

Defining a dress code may seem like a frivolous task, but first impressions do count. If suits or uniforms are the standard in your line of work you're in luck, not much effort is required to set the tone. In most other workplaces these days, from retail to finance, some form of business casual attire seems to be the norm, and professionalism is often a casualty. If you've ever seen a bank teller wearing a mini-skirt and belly-bearing top (not an uncommon sight), you have witnessed business casual gone awry.

As the boss, it's your job to set the standard and enforce a dress code that allows employees to work comfortably while projecting a professional, trustworthy appearance. Follow a few tried and true guidelines for appropriate business casual attire.

Recommended for men

- Chinos/khakis
- Sports shorts or polo shirts with collars
- Sweater or sports jacket
- Casual loafers or lace up shoes
- Well-groomed hair and nails

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To resolve complaint calls, avoid expressions of rejection or uncertainty in favor of more diplomatic and intelligent answers.

Don't say...

"I don't know."

Why it's bad...

You appear uninformed.

Try this instead...

"That's a good question. I'll try to find out more."

Don't say...

"We can't do that."

Why it's bad...

It feels like total rejection.

Try this instead...

"That's a tough one. Let's see what we can do."

Don't say...

"You'll have to..."

Why it's bad...

It sounds accusatory and bossy.

Try this instead...

"Here's how we can help you."

Don't say...

"No," to begin a sentence.

Why it's bad...

It sounds like you're not willing to help.

Try this instead...

"We aren't able to do that, but we can...."

Keep cool with complainers:

How to handle grumpy, irate and just plain rude callers

Even in the best businesses, it may be impossible to satisfy every customer all of the time. Often, customers pick up the phone to make their frustration known.

Anatomy of an irate caller

People who call your company with complaints may have valid reasons for their anger: perhaps they did not receive what they paid for or were treated rudely by one of your colleagues. Some may be calm; others quite irate. If they sense your desire to help, most will grow calmer as the call continues. Others, no matter what you try, will never feel satisfied. Maybe they're just grumpy by nature or need to vent their anger. You will not know which kind of caller you are dealing with at the start, so it helps to have a method to follow for all complaint calls.

Your mission: Stay cool

Your goal is to empathize with the caller, acknowledge the problem and do your best to resolve the issue – all without losing your most powerful tool: a positive attitude.

First, consider the caller's point of view. Be sure to acknowledge that there is a problem. Listen completely, and do not argue or criticize. Use statements such as "How can I help you?" or "What can I do for you?"

Next, offer solutions and alternatives. The caller wants to know that help is on the way. If you are not the right person to resolve the problem, direct the caller to someone who can. Then follow up to make sure the problem was resolved.

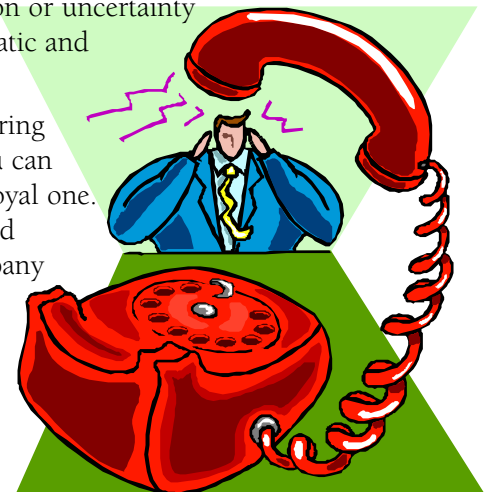
Words have power

In anger, many callers will say things that, intentionally or not, sound demeaning, such as: "I want to speak to someone who knows something." Don't get defensive. Do your best to appear informed and capable. Avoid common expressions of rejection or uncertainty (see sidebar) in favor of more diplomatic and intelligent answers.

It may be easier to keep your cool during a tough call if you remember that you can turn a complaining customer into a loyal one. If you resolve the problem quickly and courteously, you've shown your company is reliable. The complainer just may become an advocate.

Speak clearly, if you speak at all; carve every word before you let it fall.

– Oliver Wendell Holmes



Decode nonverbal cues: What body language tells us

Your attire is impeccable, your sales pitch expertly delivered. What else can you do to make a good impression, secure a sale, or inspire confidence? Pay attention to body language. From head to toe, your nonverbal cues can help or muddle your intended meaning.



Head movements: A head held straight indicates a neutral attitude. Holding your head down is perceived as negative, while tilting it at an angle means you're interested in the conversation.

Eyes: Make eye contact to show interest. Looking away indicates dishonesty or a lack of interest.

Mouth: Smile. It shows warmth and confidence and puts others at ease. Who doesn't like to interact with a friendly person?

Hands: Hand gestures may communicate enthusiasm, but too much gesturing can come across as immature or uncertain. Your best bet is to keep your arms relaxed and at your sides.

Arms: Folding your arms across your chest signals that you feel defensive.

Hand movements: Bringing a hand to the back of your neck may indicate your wish to end the conversation.

Legs: Crossing your legs can make you appear both lopsided and insecure. Sit straight up, with feet flat on the floor. Never rest one leg or ankle on the opposite knee. This posture is too relaxed for the business environment and can make you appear arrogant and unprofessional.

Understanding body language can help you be a more effective communicator – and help you read others.

Top 10 tips for impeccable telephone etiquette

1. Answer calls by the second or third ring.
2. Greet the caller, and identify yourself, your business, and your department. Be enthusiastic and respectful throughout the call.
3. Ask the caller, "To whom am I speaking?" and "How may I help you?" Then use the caller's name in conversation.
4. When you take a call, turn away from your computer and other work and keep your attention on the caller.
5. Smile. Even though callers can't see it, they'll hear the smile in your voice.
6. Use a "telephone voice," speak clearly and control the volume and speed of speech.
7. If there is a problem, be concerned, empathetic, and apologetic.
8. Never eat, drink, or chew gum while you are on a call.
9. Don't be too busy to be nice. Being busy is never an excuse to be rude. If it's an inopportune time, courteously tell the caller just that and suggest a call back time.
10. Thank the caller for calling and ask him or her to call again.

It helps a ton when you learn people's names and don't butcher them when trying to pronounce them.

– Jerry Yang

Cue the applause:

Anyone can be a better public speaker

Many business people would prefer a 10-hour flight in coach or even a tax audit to addressing an audience.

Yet, no matter what kind of business we're in, at some time we will have to address a group: in a sales meeting, at a seminar, at a bustling convention, or even to give a wedding toast. The keys to successful public speaking are preparation and relaxation. Work at both, and you are sure to be a more effective speaker, to small or large audiences.

How to prepare

First, think about your audience and what they want to hear. What works great for a group of college students may not fly at the Chamber of Commerce dinner. Challenge yourself to offer information and insights they have never heard before.

Know your stuff. Research the topic, find quotes and studies to support your ideas. The more you know, the more comfortable you will feel.

Do not leave your preparation until the last minute. Think of how much time it should take to prepare and then quadruple it.

Use humor if it feels comfortable. Not everyone is a comedian, but using humor can help you make points memorably.

Plan a strong opener to set the audience's expectations for the whole talk. They may be coming into the room with stresses and worries on their minds. Your job is to help them put those thoughts aside and focus on your message. You might start with a joke or an interesting anecdote, for example.

Rehearse your speech or sales pitch out loud until you feel comfortable and confident with the material. Practicing will also help you adjust your speech to fit the time allotted.

Be relaxed and confident

On the day of your speech or meeting, dress appropriately for the venue and in flattering clothes that allow you to move comfortably.

Speak confidently and make eye contact with the audience. Do not rush or read from your notes. Your cadence and tone of voice should display energy and enthusiasm for your topic. Use eye contact with each member of the audience in turn.

Your posture should be relaxed and natural. If you're speaking from a podium, move around a bit and use gestures.

Remember, the audience wants you to succeed. After all, they benefit when the speaker is assured and relaxed.



No Loose Threads Continued from page 1

Recommended for women:

- Casual skirts or trousers neatly pressed
- Blouses and sweater (not too tight)
- Blazers look nice over casual trousers
- Low heeled shoes or boots, no athletic footwear or beach sandals.
- Appropriate jewelry and natural looking makeup
- Clean hair and nails

Never, for either gender

- Athletic wear
- Bare midriffs or low-cut garments in front or back
- Hats and caps
- Ripped or tattered clothing
- Tight fitting clothing, short skirts or revealing clothing
- Heavy perfume or after shave
- High heels or cowboy boots (unless you're teaching ballroom dance or rustling cattle)

Add a few scenarios to help employees decide what to wear: If it's great for the gym, it's not great for the office. If it's right at a rock concert or nightclub, it's

not right for the office. When in doubt about an outfit, it's best to leave it in the closet.