

Establishing Rapport with Colleagues

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- Communicating with Colleagues

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Understanding Workplace Culture

Congratulations on landing the internship! As you transition into your new role, questions around professional etiquette may arise – particularly around communicating with your new supervisor and colleagues.

Below are some suggestions for building rapport and communicating effectively with your colleagues throughout your internship, as well as, some guidelines around email communication and using your cell phone at work.

As you read through the different sections, keep in mind that communication etiquette, or what is considered appropriate communication in the workplace, may vary from organization to organization. The last section in this handout provides some criteria for assessing your work environment in an effort to help you determine appropriate behavior in a particular workplace.

Establishing Rapport with Colleagues

Communicating with Your Supervisor

Setting the Stage for Success

1. Check in with your supervisor about their expectations and immediate priorities or goals. If this information is not shared at the start of the internship, ask to set up a meeting to discuss these topics.
2. Review the specific responsibilities of your role and how your position fits into the larger organization.
3. Share with your supervisor your goals for the internship (i.e. gain experience in particular area, learn more about roles in particular department, learn a particular skill). If your goals fall outside the scope of your immediate responsibilities, ask if there would be an opportunity to incorporate these goals during the internship without taking the focus away from meeting the priorities of the organization.
4. Ask to set a regular meeting time. Once a week for 30 minutes will allow you a chance to check in. Come to the meeting with agenda items. Taking an active role in your learning will impress your supervisor.
5. Ask how and when your performance will be evaluated.
6. Get to know your supervisor's communication preferences. Does your supervisor prefer email, phone, instant message or in-person communication?

Throughout the Internship

7. When you are given a project, find out how often and in what form you should provide project updates. If needed, ask if there are samples or examples you could use as models. Also ask about deadlines.
8. Let your supervisor know you are open to feedback and would appreciate hearing when you are meeting or exceeding expectations and when you need to improve. Not everyone feels comfortable giving regular feedback. Request feedback 3 or 4 weeks into the position to make sure you're on the right track.

9. If feedback given is not clear, ask for clarification. Helpful feedback is concrete, specific and actionable. It focuses on behavior and desired outcome.
10. Do your best and have a positive attitude regardless of the task. Do whatever is needed and do not assume that your education equips you with so much knowledge that executing low-level projects is beneath you. Your supervisor is paying attention. Little things matter. The way that you interact with your colleagues, your willingness to take on the mundane tasks, how well the job gets done – it all matters to the people around you.
11. Show your willingness to go above and beyond what is in the job description. Be proactive in asking for more projects and responsibilities. Look for opportunities to assist co-workers and volunteer for assignments that interest you.
12. Before reaching out to colleagues, let your supervisor know you would like to approach others on the team to ask if you can be of help. Your supervisor will appreciate your checking as you may have upcoming projects you are not aware of.
13. Identify your supervisors’ strengths. They may serve as mentors to you in this area. No one person can mentor or coach you in every area you wish to develop. Instead, look for people in your environment who have an expertise in areas you wish to develop. Keep in mind that a mentorship is not just a formal relationship with written goals and scheduled meeting times; it can be as informal as an occasional chat or email exchange.

Ending the Internship on a Positive Note

14. If you’re working on a project that extends past your last day, go the extra mile and create a status report. Your supervisor will appreciate not being left in the dark.
15. Meet with your supervisor at the end of the internship:
 - a. Thank your supervisor and colleagues for the opportunity and let them know what you learned from the experience.
 - b. If you would like to eventually work for the organization, let your supervisor know that you would be interested should a position become available.
 - c. Ask if your supervisor would be willing to serve as a professional reference.
 - d. Ask for any last feedback on what you did well and where you can improve.
 - e. Ask for advice they may have regarding pursuing a career in the field or if they have any recommendations of people you might connect with regarding your career interests.
16. If your supervisor and/or colleagues expressed positive feedback on any of your projects, ask if they would be willing to write a recommendation on your LinkedIn profile.

Communicating with Colleagues

Setting the Stage for Success

1. If you are not introduced to colleagues in other departments by your supervisor, take it upon yourself to introduce yourself.
2. Make one of your goals to learn specifics about your colleagues’ roles and how you can work together most effectively. Prioritize those individuals you will most frequently collaborate with during the internship.

Throughout the Internship

3. Once you get a sense of the work flow or pace in the office, ask colleagues if they would like to have coffee or lunch one day or if they have time on their schedule to meet for 20 - 30 minutes so you could learn more about their role and/or career path.
4. If you are not sure how your invitations will be received, let your supervisor know you are interested in learning more about the roles of certain individuals. Ask if it would be appropriate to approach them directly to set up a meeting or if your supervisor would suggest/recommend a different strategy.

5. Attend business and social events after work. This will provide you with the opportunity to get to know colleagues and build relationships.
6. Let team members know you are available to help with projects.
7. Ask colleagues for feedback based on what they have observed about your work.
8. If you have an innovative idea for overhauling a particular system in an organization, wait until you've established a credible reputation and rapport with your colleagues before proposing a major change. Be curious as to why the current system is being used. You may not realize that there are particular reasons why something is put in place. Colleagues will appreciate your effort to understand the current practice before suggesting changes. Once you earn colleague's trust, they may be more open to your suggestions.
9. Keep controversial opinions to yourself. Some matters, such as your political, religious or social views, are best kept out of the office. These discussions can be polarizing, and you run the risk of offending or alienating colleagues with your viewpoints, particularly when you are first getting to know them.

Ending the Internship on a Positive Note

10. Express appreciation through email or in person to your colleagues and thank them for the information, support and/or guidance they have provided.
11. Let colleagues know you would like to stay in touch and ask them what is the best way to do so.

Keeping in Touch

12. Connect with colleagues through LinkedIn.
13. Periodically communicate with colleagues to let them know your status or how something you learned at the internship or from them has helped you on your current internship or with a class project. Let them know if you followed up on any advice they gave you. Send articles you think might interest them. Send a note to let them know you've noticed new developments or changes with the organization (e.g., website changes, promotions).
14. Reconnect with former colleagues at professional conferences or trainings.

Email Etiquette

A great deal of communication in the workplace happens over email. Below are the top five email pet peeves:

1. **Avoid poor grammar and spelling.**
A typo every now and then is not a big deal. However, consistent bad grammar and spelling is inexcusable. Everything you do, say and write reflects your professionalism. When people read your messages, they naturally and automatically make a judgment about you. If your writing is poor, your credibility comes under question. Read and reread your email a few times, preferably aloud, before sending.
2. **Not knowing when to use "reply all" vs "reply."**
Just because you were one of many recipients on a message does not mean everyone needs to hear your reply. Think carefully about who needs to see the message. Use "reply all" judiciously, rather than filling your colleagues' inboxes with unnecessary emails.
3. **Writing bad subject lines or not using subject lines.**
Use straightforward subject lines that reflect the true theme of the message. For day-to-day business purposes, plain and direct text works best. So rather than have a subject line that reads, "Want to pick your brain," write, "Need your input on the X account." Realize that many people use their e-mail as a filing system, and they rely on the subject lines to find key information later. So always write detailed

subject lines, as in "PowerPoint decks on X qualitative project." And should the email's subject change as the conversation ensues, then change the subject line to reflect the new theme.

4. **E-mailing complicated information.**

If you have to give someone technical, detailed or complicated information, do it with a phone call and then send an email as a backup rather than relying solely on the e-mail communication. Email is best suited for short messages that don't require a lengthy response. If your email is more than a couple of paragraphs, pick up the phone and talk to the recipient. Additionally, if you are the recipient of a detailed message and need time to work on the reply, promptly respond with a short acknowledgment message that states, "I received your message and am working on the needed items." And if the reply requires real discussion, then pick up the phone and talk about it.

5. **Having sensitive conversations via e-mail.**

Sensitive and emotionally charged conversations have no place in an email. If you need to express disappointment or apologize, do it face-to-face (most preferred) or via phone. When a topic has emotion behind it, the recipient naturally escalates that emotion when reading the email. Why? Because it's virtually impossible to display emotion in an email and humans by nature tend to look for the worst in a message rather than the best.

6. **Not knowing that people from different cultures may speak and write differently.**

Miscommunication can easily occur because of cultural differences. Tailor your message depending on the receiver's cultural background or how well you know them. Experts in communicating cross culturally suggest that a good rule to keep in mind is that high-context cultures (Japanese, Arab, or Chinese) want to get to know you before doing business with you. Therefore, it may be common for business associates from these countries to be more personal in writing. On the other hand, people from low-context cultures (German, American, or Scandinavian) prefer to get to the point very quickly. Be sensitive to the workplace culture you are operating in when determining the tone of your email.

Cell Phone Etiquette

When it comes to using your cell phone at work, it's important to be mindful of your co-workers. Below are some suggestions for using your mobile device at work.

1. **Turn your ringer OFF or set to vibrate.**

Unless your cell phone is company-issued for business use, set your unit to vibrate while at your desk. Repetitive incoming calls will be noticed (negatively) by co-workers and management.

2. **Let unimportant calls go to voicemail.**

While it's wonderful to maintain connection with the important people in your life, chatty calls during work will often reflect negatively on your perceived concentration on your duties.

3. **When you must use your cell phone, find a private, quiet place to make your call.**

Regardless of where you are, maintain a buffer zone of at least ten feet from others while using your phone. While at work, find locations that do not infringe on coworkers trying to perform their jobs.

4. **Don't bring your cell phone to meetings.**

Neglecting this one rule can do career damage. If an important call is expected, either for a business or a family emergency, you could put your cell phone on vibrate, bring it with you and, if appropriate, explain why it is there. Do not use it to text, read emails or post status updates. Keep your eyes on whomever is

speaking and stay engaged in the meeting. Doing anything else will be a clear signal to your boss that your mind isn't on the business at hand. If you must bring your phone to a meeting, do not place it on the table. It is a distraction to all.

5. **Never talk on your cell phone in restrooms.**

Why? You often do not know who else may be using the facilities. Should you communicate private information or sensitive work issues, you may easily be overheard without your knowledge. Also sounds from the bathroom can be heard by the person on the other line and may trigger concerns about your personal judgment.

6. **Don't use embarrassing ring tones.**

Along with possibly annoying both coworkers and supervisors, a silly ring tone can negatively impact your career by portraying a less than professional image.

7. **Give 100% focus to the person in front of you.**

Don't interrupt a face-to-face conversation with someone by taking a call or texting. In doing so, you are communicating to the person in front of you that they are unimportant.

8. **Include an email signature on business emails sent from your cell phone.**

Emails from mobile devices only have your name and the type of device the message was sent from. It's important to include your work contact information so people can easily respond to you.

Workplace Culture and Its Influence on Professional Etiquette

Professional etiquette is a set of unwritten and unspoken rules that determine what is considered appropriate behavior in a work environment. The rules of etiquette are unique to every organization and are based on its culture. You will have to assess what is appropriate in your work environment.

Paying attention to the following can help you understand an organization's culture:

Work style and communication:

- How does work get done? Collaboratively? Independently? A combination?
- How are decisions made? Consensus-driven? Authoritatively?
- How are things communicated? Verbally or in written form? Directly or indirectly? Voicemail, email, or in person?
- How often do people communicate with one another?
- What do people write to one another? What is said in memos or emails? What is the tone of messages (formal or informal, pleasant or hostile, etc...)
- What are meetings like? Serious? Lighthearted? Tightly or loosely structured?
- Who speaks up at meetings? Everyone? Just those above a certain level?
- How is conflict handled? How are differences treated?

Values:

- What words do people use to describe the organization?
- What do people appreciate about working at the organization? What do people find challenging or seem to struggle with at organization?
- What do people get emotional about? (People get excited or upset by things that are important to them.)

Professional opportunities and advancement:

- What types of people tend to do well here? Individual contributors? Team players? People who are proactive or more responsive?
- How are people who do well rewarded?
- What happens when people don't perform well? Is feedback given and how?
- How is the organization and/or department structured? Hierarchical or flat? Centralized or decentralized authority? Clear reporting structures or matrix?

Work hours and commitment to work:

- How many hours a week are employees expected to work on average? How does this expectation match up with the hours actually worked?
- When do colleagues arrive at work, and when do they leave?
- Do meetings start promptly?
- How long do people leave for lunch? Do they sit at their desks while eating?
- Does the organization provide flexible work schedules or allow for telecommuting, or do they prefer people to work set hours?
- Do employees take time off regularly or during certain periods of time?
- Is travel expected and how much?
- Are employees expected to be available and accessible after work hours?
- Are employees expected to stay a certain number of years or expected to transition frequently?

Architecture, aesthetics, and atmosphere:

- How are offices set up? Open environment? Closed-door offices?
- How much space is given to whom? Where are people located?
- What is posted on bulletin boards or displayed on walls?
- What is displayed on desks or in other areas of the building?
- How are common areas utilized?
- Are special occasions celebrated (birthdays, baby showers, holidays, organizational successes)?
- How do people dress? More formally? Less formally?
- What do people do for fun?
- Do employees socialize outside of work?
- Do employees go out to lunch? Have lunch together? Eat at their desks?

Other Resources

Kwintessential – International Etiquette Guides 80+ countries

<http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/country-profiles.html>

Stanford Bridge Peer Counseling Center – limited hours during the summer

<https://stanfordbridge.wordpress.com/>

Stanford Sexual Harassment Policy Office

<https://harass.stanford.edu/>