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Cubicle Courtesy

Are you being a considerate colleague in the office?

by Dr. Beverly Langford, author of "The Etiquette Edge" and president of LMA Communication. Dr. Langford teaches management communication in the Robinson College of Business, Georgia State University.

June 12, 2008

The office lined with cubicles has cut costs and increased efficiencies. However, this open floor plan presents significant challenges. Laughter, loud conversations, or the smell of pizza can interfere with your concentration and test your patience. The good news is that small behavioral adjustments can make a huge difference between congeniality and conflict. Here are five suggestions.

Do a reality check on your workplace habits and your workspace décor.

What co-worker habits annoy you? Now think about your own behavior. Are you guilty of anything that might irritate or disturb your co-workers? Do you have a loud voice or a distinctive laugh? Do you intrude into colleagues' cubicles to chat? Do you come to work sick and sneeze all over your co-workers?



If you choose to decorate your workspace with personal items, keep it low key and in good taste. Make sure that what you choose to display doesn't offend someone else.

Don't contribute to noise pollution.

For many people, noise rates as the most serious offender in the cubicle world. Use ear buds for music, and don't yell across partitions. For impromptu meetings involving more than two people, find a conference room.

Answer your phone promptly or set it to go into voice mail after two rings. Avoid or limit use of the speakerphone. Put your cell phone ringer volume on low or vibrate, and take it with you or turn it off when you leave your office.

Cubicle dwellers complain about neighbors who carry on personal or even intimate conversations without thinking about who can overhear them. Keep personal conversations in the cube as neutral and inoffensive as possible, and use your library voice. Find some privacy to conduct highly personal calls.

Leave last night's shrimp scampi at home.

Smelly food ranks up there with noise among cubicle offenders. When you pack food to reheate at work, remember that what smells delicious to you might be disgusting to others. You can eat whatever you choose in the company cafeteria, a neighborhood restaurant, or on a park bench, but when you eat in the office, limit your selections to mild or odorless foods.

Use good "scents."

A close second in the odor-complaint department is too much perfume. Many people are allergic to ingredients in these products, prompting some companies to go fragrance-free. Even if your company has not reacted that aggressively, courtesy dictates that no perfume (or a very light application) in close quarters and unscented personal care products are the best choice.

Remember that a cubicle is someone's office. Although cubicles don't match our traditional concept of offices, remember, they are still "private" spaces, and the people in them don't need unwelcome intrusion. You wouldn't enter a conventional office when the door is closed.

If someone looks busy, assume his or her "door" is closed. Similarly, if you don't want an interruption and someone is hovering around your doorway, you might say, "Is there something I can help you with quickly? I'm on deadline, but I can answer a question."

Creating a harmonious workplace

Today's workplaces are communities in which co-workers experience personal and organizational successes and failures, celebrating good times and surviving crises. At the same time, stress levels are high and the pace is frantic. If we work together to make our workplace a

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pleasant place to gather, interact, create, and achieve, we will all benefit, both as individuals and as organizations.



*Beverly Y. Langford is president of **LMA Communication**, a consulting, training, and coaching firm that works with organizations and individuals on strategic communication, effective interpersonal communication skills, team building, and leadership development. She also the author of *The Etiquette Edge*.*

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Bev Stovall November 20, 2008, 9:30 am

oh how i wish everyone in the cubicle world could read this.just now as i send this, the amount of non-business chatter is almost unbearable trying to get my work done.i just don't understand the attitude and disrespect workers have in today's work enviroment.i'm counting the days until i can retire in 2018!! am tired of the excuse of, well there is no job loyalty due to possible lay-offs, down-sizing, contracting work out. My grandmother worked for National Cash Register in Dayton, Ohio and when it came time for her to retire in the mid-60's they demoted her from shop foreman to scrubbing toilets at night just hoping she would quit just to get out of paying her retirement. But grandma stuck it out those last two years and she got her retirement. Just proving that job security is not a thing of the past. so if someone is working,even with these things hanging over your head, at least be the best worker you can be and stop being a nuisance to your fellow co-workers.



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