



The Modern Work Etiquette Guide

You remember the epic scene on HBO's *Girls*: Hannah, the young job hunter, hits it off with her older would-be boss, and thinking they've totally bonded, drops a rape joke on him. He ends the meeting right then and there and tells her she may not be cut out for an office environment. So...is anyone *really* that clueless? Unfortunately, yes, say the career gurus we talked to. In fact, they see these kinds of faux pas happening more and more.

That actually makes sense. It's a landmark moment in workplace history: Four generations are trying to collaborate, but big differences in work styles and attitudes are creating issues. "We've got Baby Boomers [ages 48 to 66], Gen-Xers [ages 36 to 47], and Gen-Yers plus Millennials [ages 15 to 35]—it's a big group, but most experts lump them together because of their similar POVs—working together, and there are major discrepancies in their work mind-sets," says business-etiquette coach Lyudmila Bloch, who has consulted for companies like J.P. Morgan. Eric Holtzclaw, CEO of UserInsight, a research firm

When it comes to office dynamics, the generational divide can be a source of serious tension. Here's how to minimize the drama while still letting your personality shine.

By Sarah Bruning

in Atlanta, agrees: "These groups work differently," he says. "Boomers were forced to adapt to the internet and would prefer to opt out of social media; Gen-Xers are managing, but they're rule breakers at heart; and Gen-Yers and the Millennials are in it for the life experience and expect flexibility." The key to navigating the current world of work etiquette is knowing who you're dealing with and finding a middle ground. Here's what you need to know.

The Generation Mix

See who's working together these days.

BABY BOOMERS (born 1946 to 1964)

Work traits: Competitive, hardworking, experimental, truth-focused

GEN X (born 1965 to 1976)

Work traits: Self-reliant, practical, independent, rule-breaking

GEN Y/MILLENNIALS (born 1977 to 1997)

Work traits: Immediacy-obsessed (this is the Google generation), tolerant, confident rule-following, mentor-loving

Cosmo's Handy Work Translator

The office can feel like a mini United Nations, with each generation speaking a totally different language. Career expert Bruce Tulgan, author of *It's Okay to Manage Your Boss*, breaks down how each group thinks and offers a response that works for everyone.

THE SCENARIO: You disagree with a decision your supervisor made.

A Millennial/Gen-Yer says: "My opinion is equally valid."

A Gen-Xer says: "I'll show you how and why you are wrong."

A Boomer says: "Whatever you say." (The Boomer will pretend to agree, then go do it her way anyway.)

This works for everyone: "Is this something we can discuss further? I have another idea for how it could work."

Why it's better: You have less authority than your boss, so you do need to be deferential when raising your disagreement. It's best to offer your supervisor a chance to consider your point of view.

THE SCENARIO: An extra project pops up and your name is volunteered.

A Millennial/Gen-Yer says: "What's the project? I'll do it if it sounds fun."

A Gen-Xer says: "Sure, as long as I'm leading the team."

A Boomer says: "Put it over there on my pile."

This works for everyone: "I'd love to take it on. Should this take precedence over my other projects?"

Why it's better: You want to signal to your bosses that you're willing to go the extra mile—but get direction on what priority this new assignment holds.

The Do-or-Dies of Work E-Mail

Avoid these pitfalls *before* you hit send.

Don't Use It as a Fallback

E-mail can feel safe and easy, but it isn't always efficient. "You will forge meaningful relationships and avoid miscommunications by picking up the phone or walking over to a desk," says John Leahy, president of Kind Snacks.

Read, Then Reread

A must-do, especially if you're sending an e-mail from your phone. You don't want to end up on the *FU, Auto Correct!* blog for writing *clitoris* to your boss when you meant *clothes*.

Gauge the Office Culture

Casual greetings (like "Hey!") aren't off-limits, but take your cues from how your bosses (or clients) communicate. As for internet slang like LOLZ, "It can look juvenile," says etiquette expert Anna Post. Same goes for emoticons.

Social-Media Wins (and Fails)

In an age when your boss could be your Twitter follower or Facebook friend, how to act online can be confusing. Here's a crash course.

WIN: Tweeting a thought-provoking article that's relevant to your industry

FAIL: Tweeting at a hiring manager about how disappointed you are that she chose another candidate (or worse, hate-tweeting about your layoff!)

WIN: Requesting your boss on LinkedIn with a personalized message a few months after joining a new company

FAIL: Requesting a manager on Facebook (unless she tells you to, just don't)

WIN: Instagramming G-rated snapshots of your exciting life outside work.

FAIL: Instagramming your drunk friend's hilariously vulgar poses from that party (unless your account is 100 percent private)

The Best New On-the-Job Rules

...and two old ones that still hold true.

RULE 1 Get (Selectively) Personal

We used to be warned against sharing personal info at work. But according to Elisabeth Kelan, PhD, author of *Rising Stars: Developing Millennial Women as Leaders*, divulging the right kind of details can impress: "For instance, someone who tweets about her volunteer work can enhance her professional persona," she says.

RULE 2 Ask About Extras

Millennials get a bad rap for expecting overly flexible hours or fast-tracked promotions, but asking about management workshops or chances to mentor others comes across as proactive, says Jeanne Meister, coauthor of *The 2020 Workplace*.

RULE 3 Leave Mom and Dad at Home

Multiple hiring managers we talked to shared tales of helicopter parents calling the office on behalf of their adult child. *Huge* no-no. "Letting your parents call your boss is irritating to employers and signals that you're immature," says Meister.

YES, THESE STILL APPLY!

Respect the Chain of Command

"Once, a junior staffer wrote our CEO to complain about her job—without telling her manager first. It was embarrassing for everyone and not productive," says Jennifer Romolini, editor of Yahoo Shine. "There's a chain of command you have to respect."

Make It About Them

"Many managers find millennials too demanding when it comes to needing guidance and feedback," says Ronald Alsop, author of *The Trophy Kids Grow Up*. Rather than making requests all about you, save up your questions for a quick meeting with your boss and ask her how you can help the team.

Is It Ever Okay To...

...Text your supervisor? *Only if she has okayed it.*

...Text a potential boss? *Nope.*

...Tweet about a new job? *Only after you've signed the paperwork and given notice at your old place.*

...Say "Not much" when someone senior asks what you're working on? *No.*

...Swear at the office? *Does your CEO?*