

## Mind your manners

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**Sticky situation #1: Your idea or mine?**

You've spent countless hours and sleepless nights nurturing an idea from infancy to brilliancy. Now a more 'proactive' colleague has presented your masterpiece as work of their own. It hurts. It's unfair. What do you do with an offender who whisked away your moment of glory?

First, take a deep breath. Heat of the moment decisions are not your best strategy. Rationally assess the facts. Is the person in question a mean go-getter or was it just a simple mistake? Go and talk to them; open professional conversation can save relationships. Chances are, they will be grateful and volunteer to solve the issue.

If, however, you are met with a cold stare, you might be dealing with a ruthless 'career builder'. In this case, inform your superiors – state the facts without unleashing your emotions. Or, perhaps, let it go. Dirty tactics like these are not long lived in the professional world.

### **Sticky situation #2: That's not what I meant!**

You are fuming. Can't they understand that the new policy is not going to work? Who could possibly come up with such an absurd solution? You see Mary and tell her all about it. You feel better. If only someone warned you that your boss was passing by and overheard your less-than-flattering comments about him...

Mum was right: "Don't bitch about the boss on company time." Now that you've been caught red-handed you've got some cleaning up to do. Apologise to the boss and admit your wrongdoing. It may be hard, but the sooner you do it, the better.

Explain why you feel the way you do and try to work out your actions in tune with the policy. One day it will be your turn to make those decisions, and surely there will be those taking it with a grin. Until then, bite your tongue and work your way to the top.

### **Sticky situation #3: Romance is in the air**

Blame the weather, but you can't get over that new marketing consultant in the office. Eyes meet, flirty remarks are exchanged, and eventually, your work computer becomes your partner in crime by generating love-fueled e-mails. Welcome to the world of office romance – thrilling, exciting, and often awful and disappointing. If only the heart and mind worked in sync! Consider the consequences. If your affair breaks as rapidly as it started, are you prepared to face your ex on a daily basis?

If you both see yourselves living happily ever after, deal with your feelings in a professional way. You may feel like you're on a honeymoon, but work is work. Save hugs, cute names, and flirting for when the both of you are behind closed doors.

### **Sticky situation #4: It's time to go**

Good or bad, changes can be challenging. Maybe you're relocating to a different branch. Perhaps you're looking for another company to represent. Or (may this never happen to you), you are getting fired. Whatever the reason, things look more glamorous over the hedge and you are making a move.

**Rule one:** Leave with dignity. You don't want to be the employee escorted from the office by security guards.

**Rule two:** Honour your company's confidentiality. Professionals stay ethical regardless of the circumstances.

**Rule three:** What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas. Do not tell the world derogatory stories about your previous employer or past colleagues.

The feedback you give about your past is an indication of what you are going to say about your present. Don't jeopardise your future chances. Eventually the ripples dissolve and you'll be grateful you didn't dampen your image.

### **A final thought**

Good manners won't substitute the skill and knowledge you need to perform in your role. They will, however, give you a competitive advantage and over time will help you to position yourself as an industry icon.

It takes years to build a reputation and one silly action to stain it. Learn from advice shared with us by Sheryle Moon, the Executive Director of the Australasian Association of Convenience Stores (AACS): "Before you do anything, write anything or say anything, think, what would it look like on the front page of the Sydney Morning Herald?" It's food for thought, isn't it?

**Elena Reed** is a speaker and stylist specialising in image and business etiquette. She runs webinars for professionals to help them create a winning image for career and personal success. Meet Elena at [www.elenareed.com.au](http://www.elenareed.com.au).