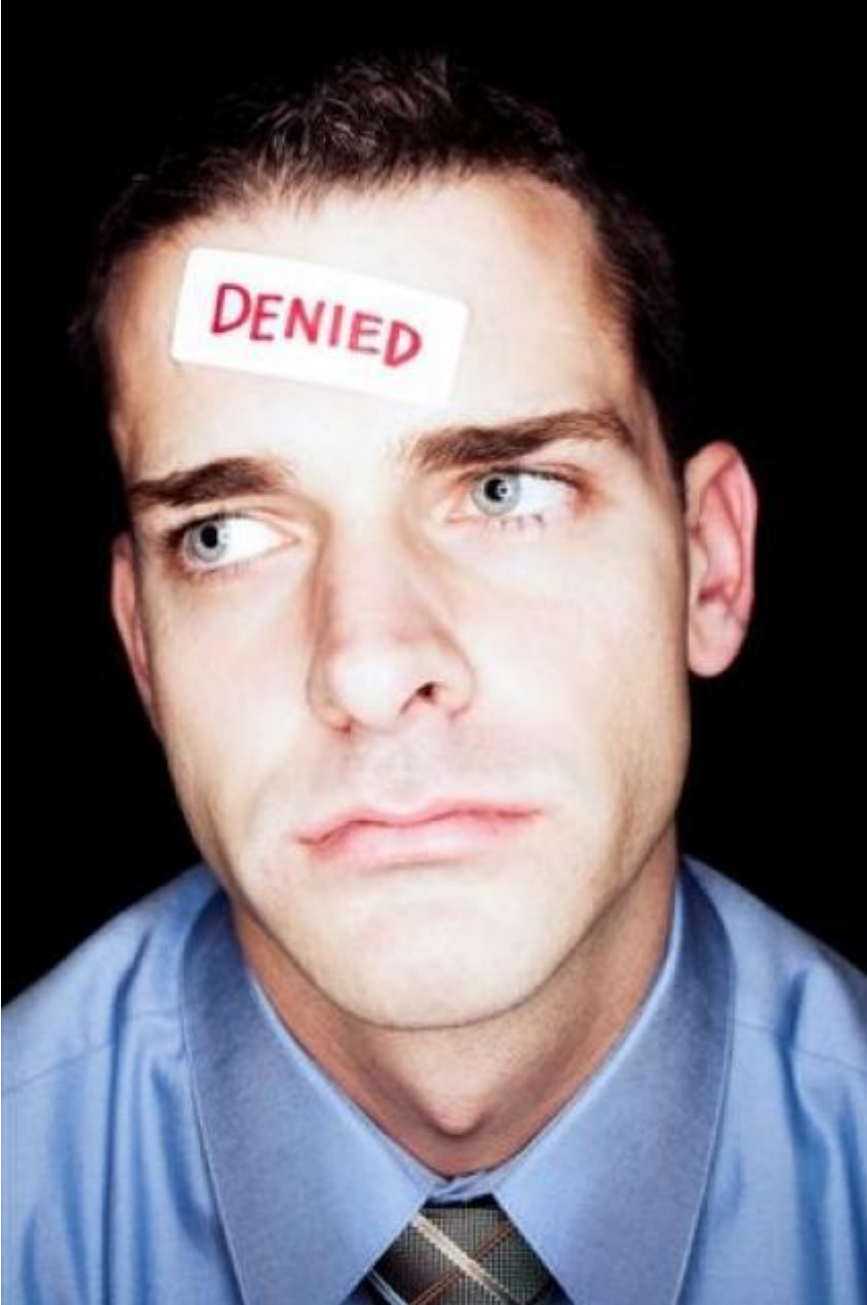


Work Etiquette

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Mind your manners

What to say in tricky situations.

Your personal style is as much about your etiquette as it is about your appearance. It can be difficult to keep composure and maintain respect in emotionally charged situations, but always remember that the words you utter today may choke you in the future – no matter what level of the business you work on. Story by Elena Reed.

Etiquette tips for tougher times

Etiquette and professional protocols are unlikely to be at the forefront of peoples' minds when many are struggling to meet targets and feeling insecure about their jobs. During difficult times it can be harder to muster manners, but the way you treat people now will have ramifications in your business and social life when the economy picks up.

The storms will pass. The troubles will fade. It's your personal history and professional imprint that will be remembered for years. Here are some tips on what to do and what to say in some nowadays tricky situations.

Work

The sorrow of layoffs

Losing a job is as tough as it gets. What do you do if you know your co-worker is just about to be laid off? The answer is nothing. Don't be the news breaker unless it's your direct responsibility to inform the less fortunate colleague. On the other hand, if somebody you know has been laid off, do not pretend you're unaware. Face the inevitable by saying "I am sorry it happened" and offer your help where you can. Don't beat yourself up though if you are the one who's going to stay. That's not your fault and there's not much you can do but be caring, understanding and supportive.

Too many job seekers, too little time

If you've been overwhelmed by job seekers lately, it's hard to be nice when you're busy beyond yourself. Behind each application however is a real person. *Treat others like you want to be treated* stands true for any economic times. Do return each phone call, acknowledge receipt of resumes and give updates on the progress to those who made an effort to apply. What goes around comes around.

When you're the job hunter

If you happen to be on the other side, leaving for the new shores, be wise not to dampen your reputation by bad mouthing your old boss, being the tell-all about your former colleagues or being bitter about the company you worked for. You don't know where your angry words may travel to. Instead, embrace the challenge and turn the disadvantage into an opportunity by staying poised and professional at all times. The sooner you move on, the quicker some new doors will open for you.

Friends

Less is definitely more

The fact is when the pockets are tighter, 'the excess' is no longer fashionable. Try not to talk to the world about your expensive holidays (even if you've just returned from one), tame down the bling and designer logos (even if you can afford them) and don't boast your latest promotion to a 'here-today-redundant-tomorrow' friend. Sympathy goes a long way in building your personal loyalty.

The lunch dilemma

When wining and dining, who will pick up the bill when the tab hits the table? If your companion is rolling their eyes in hope that the little black book will take care of itself, be nice but firm. A simple "Would you mind splitting the bill?" is gracefully sufficient. Key point: If you don't have the funds to cover your lunch, you shouldn't go.

When the bill bites

So what do you do if you've been invited to a function you can't afford to attend? Should you cut off your phone line and pretend you've forgotten? Definitely not! Honesty is always your best bet as real friends are there to understand. You don't need to go into full detail of your current financial situation. Simply RSVP, offer your apologies for not being able to make it this time and suggest some alternative plans on another day, in line with your budget.

Social

Shall you loan?

If a person you care about asks you to help out it's incredibly hard not to get involved. Saying "no" however, is perfectly fine if you are under financial strain yourself. Don't feel you're letting them down. Quite the opposite – you're maintaining the relationship long-term. No one would benefit if you have to demand your loan back or cope with not having the funds to live on. If you decide to go ahead, take it easy. As one Chinese proverb says – "don't loan the money you are not prepared to lose".

Zip up your mouth

So how do you feel when you are given advice you haven't asked for? I thought so. Me, too. Approve it or not, if someone you know is spending unreasonably, it's none of your business, even if you just want to help. It's their journey, their life and their money as much as you would like to caution and cushion the possible negative implications for them. Short and sharp: don't give advice unless you are asked for it.

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