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STOP TEXTING UNDER THE TABLE



BARBARA PACHTER
EXPLAINS HOW
business etiquette
IS CHANGING.

BY MATTHEW BUDMAN

HOW DOES ONE DRESS FOR A SKYPE CONVERSATION WITH AN ETIQUETTE EXPERT? BARBARA PACTER WRITES: “MAKE SURE YOUR CLOTHING IS APPROPRIATE. JUST BECAUSE YOU ARE NOT MEETING IN PERSON DOES NOT MEAN THE INTERVIEWER OR BUSINESS ASSOCIATE CANNOT SEE WHAT YOU ARE WEARING. AND DON’T ASSUME ONLY YOUR UPPER BODY IS SHOWING. DRESS PROFESSIONALLY FROM HEAD TO TOE.”

Honestly, “. . . to toe” seemed excessive, and fortunately, Pachter didn’t insist on a full-body scan.

In *The Essentials of Business Etiquette: How to Greet, Eat, and Tweet Your Way to Success* (McGraw-Hill), she takes on a wide range of up-to-date proper business behavior, from how to properly shake hands to warnings to spend less time on Twitter—which, really, seems like advice that shouldn’t need to be given. “Yes,” she agrees. “But we’re not quite there yet with social media. There’s a learning curve. I think in another couple of years, everyone will know the guidelines. But the difficulty with technology, the good and the bad, is that as soon as we overcome a major hurdle, there’s a new type of technology out there, and we have to start all over again!”

Pachter spoke from her home in Cherry Hill, N.J.



AS OUR PERSONAL LIVES SHADE INTO OUR WORK LIVES, HAS THE SCOPE OF “BUSINESS ETIQUETTE” EXPANDED? ARE YOU MORE OFTEN OFFERING ADVICE ON WHAT PEOPLE DO AFTER 5 P.M.?

Yes. We have become 24/7, and it used to be that if you wrote an email to somebody at 9 o’clock at night, you would wait and send it the next morning, before you left for the office. Now, people are sending emails at 9 o’clock, *and they’re getting answers!* Go to bed! The workday is over! And smartphones have changed things, because at some companies, you would carry two phones, but a lot of them now are allowing you to have one phone that’s your work and your personal phone. So you’re *never* away. There’s no downtime. And we really have to work to make sure that when we close the office door, we leave everything behind.

AREN’T COMPANIES INCREASINGLY AWARE THAT THIS IS A PROBLEM? AT THE CONFERENCE BOARD, THERE’S SOMETHING OF A MANDATE TO TRY NOT TO SEND EMAILS ON THE WEEKENDS—AND, IF YOU DO, TO TRY NOT TO EXPECT REPLIES.

The emphasis is on *try* not to. Not *don’t*.

IT STILL HAPPENS, OF COURSE: ENTIRE CONVERSATIONS TAKE PLACE OVER THE WEEKEND, WITH HALF A DOZEN PEOPLE INVOLVED.

The guideline used to be that you needed to respond to emails within twenty-four hours. Now, people expect an answer right away, and you feel guilty if you can’t do it. I do coaching, and if I got an email right now, I wouldn’t respond to it—and the sender might wonder, “Well, why *can’t* you respond right away?”

SO MUCH OF NEW BUSINESS ETIQUETTE COMES FROM TECHNOLOGY. HAS THE INFORMALITY AND IMMEDIACY OF EMAIL, CHAT, AND SOCIAL MEDIA CHANGED BEHAVIOR IN THE REAL-WORLD WORKPLACE?

I don’t believe it’s changed it, but people have gotten into more trouble because of it. People send emails without thinking. People send emails on their phone and use text shortcuts, and they’re not OK in an email. One woman interviewed for a job, went to write her thank-you note from her phone, forgot it was an email, used text shortcuts, and didn’t get the job as a result. There are consequences to all of these things. So

technology has absolutely changed the way we interact with each other.

But there’s a learning curve with technology. I don’t have to remind people not to use all caps in an email anymore. That’s been around for a while. I don’t have to remind people, if they’re leaving a voice-mail message, to speak slowly and to say the number slowly. I don’t even have to remind people to put their phone on vibrate anymore. Most people know to do that. But now, it’s the texting under the table. People are still doing that. In my experience, it’s slightly better. What happens is, over time, etiquette experts weigh in, and people learn from their mistakes. So ultimately, I think it will be to the same level that phone-on-vibrate and everything else is. But we’re just not quite there yet with texting under the table.

OF COURSE, THE PEOPLE WHO MOST NEED YOUR ADVICE ARE THOSE NEW TO THE BUSINESS WORLD—IT CAN BE A ROUGH TRANSITION OUT OF COLLEGE. BUT WHAT ABOUT EXPERIENCED PEOPLE? HOW MUCH HELP DO THEY NEED?

They often need more than they think. They haven’t gotten a refresher, and the



Etiquette Advice

A LOT OF WOMEN, AND SOME MEN, DON'T STAND WHEN THEY GO TO SHAKE HANDS WITH SOMEONE. **YOU ARE EXCLUDING YOURSELF WHEN YOU STAY SEATED.** YOU'RE MORE APT TO HAVE A CONVERSATION WITH SOMEONE IF THAT PERSON IS STANDING. YOU'RE AT AN EQUAL LEVEL.

business world is always changing. And oftentimes, people are unaware of how they present themselves to others. They don't realize what their clothing is telling people; they don't know how to shake hands; they don't even greet people properly. Small things can make a big difference in how you establish a relationship with someone. The person who you say hello to on the way to the meeting may ultimately be sitting next to you *at* that meeting, and you've already established what I call minor rapport.

And people don't stop to think about it. We get so preoccupied that we don't realize that every day we are establishing our image at work.

IN YOUR SEMINARS, IS THERE ANYTHING PEOPLE ASK ABOUT THAT SURPRISES YOU? ANYTHING THAT MAKES YOU WONDER HOW THEY DON'T KNOW THAT?

I get more questions on the handshake than anything I teach. I just did a blog post on handshakes—it's not for men only!—and the comments were interesting: I had a woman in her early 40s who asked me, "When did women start shaking hands?" The old guideline used to be that men needed to wait for women to extend their hands. Because there are more women now, the handshake is not a gendered greeting—it is the business greeting. And did you ever get a handshake that was limp? We make all *sorts* of assumptions about people based on that. People don't know when to do it; they don't know *how* to do it.

They also don't *stand*. When I go around in my seminars and I go to shake people's hands, only 30 to 35 percent of the women stand. About 75 percent of the men stand.

I make a living talking about little things—you put them all together and they create an impression of you, and it can work for you or against you. One of the little things is standing. A lot of women, and some men, don't stand when they go to shake hands with someone. You are *excluding* yourself when you stay seated. You're more apt to have a conversation with someone if that person is standing. You're at an equal level.

These are the subtle things that establish a good image or take away from your image. There are a *lot* of little things that have big consequences, regardless of your tenure in the workplace.

HOW HAVE CASUAL FRIDAYS AND DOTCOM INFORMALITY CHANGED BUSINESS DRESS? IS IT MORE OF AN EFFORT FOR COMPANIES TO ENFORCE DRESS CODES?

A lot of companies are now casual every day. It depends on the industry. Every decision you make with regard to dress has to do with who you're meeting with, what's your purpose, what type of organization, and people don't always stop to consider that. So there are some very casual companies, and that may be perfectly appropriate. But then, if you want to go sell to a high-ranking official, you may want to think about your dress. When Mark Zuckerberg went to meet his bankers initially for his IPO, he wore a hoodie. They didn't like that; he got some bad press. And the IPO didn't do so well. I'm sure it had nothing to do with the hoodie, but why take the chance?

IS IT MORE OF A PROBLEM FOR COMPANIES TO ENFORCE DRESS CODES TODAY, ASSUMING THEY HAVE THEM?

It is, because when you say *casual* and you don't define it, it can be more difficult to define than professional dress. People do all *sorts* of things. There are bellies showing; there's way too much skin showing; people wear see-through tops; any sense of what's appropriate can be tossed out the window.

Remember that etiquette is allowing you to present yourself professionally in the workplace through your words, actions, and appearance. And when you do follow etiquette, you're more apt to create the relationships you want to create. That's the goal of etiquette: creating relationships so you can accomplish what you want to accomplish and feel good about yourself.

But things do adapt to the times. For instance, there's a whole area of gender etiquette. The rules used to be very set; now, things are a little bit looser. It used to be that men paid the bill; now, the host or the highest-ranking person pays the bill, and sometimes that highest-ranking person is a woman. But internationally, even if that's the case, sometimes men won't let you pay anyway.

I WAS A LITTLE SURPRISED TO SEE THAT IN YOUR BOOK, ONE OF FOUR SECTIONS IS DEVOTED TO BUSINESS MEALS. I WOULD HAVE GUESSED THAT THERE WAS LESS BUSINESS DINING THESE DAYS AND THEREFORE PEOPLE DIDN'T NECESSARILY NEED TO THINK SO MUCH ABOUT WHAT TO ORDER AND HOW MUCH TO DRINK.

There was less during the recession; people were entertaining on a shoestring. But business is back, and so is dining. People still entertain, and people still go out with potential customers. And how you handle yourself at a business meal, like most things, can and will come back to haunt you. When you're interviewing, the second or third interview may occur at a meal. And who would you rather hire or promote: Somebody who knew how to order, didn't chew their food with their mouth wide open, stayed sober or got drunk? There are all *sorts* of opportunities for others to judge you based on how you present yourself. Just because you're out of the office doesn't mean your manners don't matter.

AND YOU SAY THAT YOU GET MORE QUESTIONS ON DINING ETIQUETTE THAN ANYTHING ELSE.

Think about it: In today's world, we don't always sit down at the dinner table together as a family. Kids are running off to school activities, parents are working late, and where did you learn how to present yourself at a restaurant unless your parents taught you at the dinner table? Some parents allow their kids to bring their smartphones to the dinner table. That's the time to *talk!*

SPEAKING OF SMARTPHONES: IN SEMINARS, DO YOU EVER MEET PEOPLE WHO GENUINELY DON'T KNOW WHAT'S APPROPRIATE PHONE ETIQUETTE?

A lot of people just have no idea what to do. And if you ask them—you see, they don't think about it. They pick up a phone and start using it. They don't think about how they use phones will affect other people. So it's not that they don't *know*—they don't even *know* they don't know. That's the interesting part.

The new thing now is telling people, "Please do not leave your phone on the table." Because if I have my phone out, what I am saying is that, "I am *so* ready to drop you and pick up that phone." And people just don't think about that. In my seminars, I ask people to not text under the table and to put their phones away. In another year or two, I won't even have to say that.

PEOPLE TEXT UNDER THE TABLE IN YOUR SEMINARS?

Not anymore. But they'll try.

IS SOCIAL MEDIA THE BIGGEST AREA FOR WHICH EVERYONE IS STILL TRYING TO FIGURE OUT THE RULES?

Everyone *knows* it's not private, but they think there's no consequence to what they put online. And people have gotten fired because of what they've posted on social media. One woman was in New Orleans at a conference; she posted on her Facebook page: "Off to another stupid meeting. Would much rather be on Bourbon Street." And her boss *saw* that. She didn't get fired, but her boss lost a lot of respect for her.



THE NEW THING NOW IS TELLING PEOPLE, "PLEASE DO NOT LEAVE YOUR PHONE ON THE TABLE." BECAUSE IF I HAVE MY PHONE OUT, WHAT I AM SAYING IS THAT, "I AM SO READY TO DROP YOU AND PICK UP THAT PHONE."

Now Is the Time To Turn Off Your Cell Phone



BY DANIEL POST SENNING

The key to using the smartphone successfully is to be in control of it. Far too often, people get a mobile phone and then feel compelled to always respond to it even if it means interrupting people they are with.

When I conduct a business-etiquette seminar for a company, inevitably the person hiring me has a particular issue the company wants addressed. Not surprisingly, one of the top issues I hear is: "Tell them not to use their smartphones during a meeting." One CEO at a consulting firm was adamant about solving this problem. His employees were so addicted to their smartphones that they were constantly checking them during meetings.

When I customized the seminar for this client, I built in five moments where the point about no cell phones in meetings could be made. Amazingly, just as I reached the point when I brought the issue up for the third time, lo and behold, a phone began ringing. People started looking around; no one was taking responsibility. Finally, one consultant sheepishly reached into her handbag and turned off the phone. Of course, by the time she reached into the bag, the ribbing she got from the other participants was far more effective than anything I could have said.

Later, after the fifth time that I raised the phone issue during the seminar, I looked over at the CEO and asked, "Have I made it clear enough for you?" He smiled and replied, "I think you have." I asked him that question not as a joke but as a final emphasis of the point. The company was serious, and the CEO was serious. The culture at the company had to change. No more smartphone use during meetings.

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THAT JUST SOUNDS AS THOUGH SHE FAILED TO PROPERLY SET HER PRIVACY SETTINGS. PLUS, YOU SHOULDN'T FRIEND YOUR BOSS, RIGHT?

Well, that's a big question. Should you Friend your boss? Young people think that these hierarchies don't *really* exist, at least not the way they used to. But if he or she constantly sees drunken photos of you on Facebook, that *will* affect his or her impression of you. He or she may still like you as a friend but won't promote you as an employee.

IS IT REASONABLE TO EXPECT PEOPLE TO NOT SAY ANYTHING IN THEIR PERSONAL LIVES ABOUT THEIR WORK LIVES? AS LONG AS YOUR BOSS ISN'T YOUR FRIEND, AND YOU'RE CAREFUL ABOUT YOUR PRIVACY SETTINGS, WHAT'S WRONG WITH COMPLAINING ABOUT WORK?

Well, I would say it's foolish to complain about it online.

NOT THAT I WOULD EVER COMPLAIN ABOUT WORK ON FACEBOOK.

You can *talk* about work there if you want to. But if you start complaining about it—if you're cursing about it, if you're putting people down—you're creating a not-very-positive image of yourself. And your boss may not see it directly, but other people may tell him or her about it. Why take the risk? There are just *so* many stories out there of people getting in trouble. And I would *not* trust privacy controls. I would not trust my career to technology always working.

HOW HAVE SOCIAL MEDIA, AND INFORMAL ONLINE COMMUNICATION, CHANGED INTIMACY IN THE WORKPLACE? DO PEOPLE NATURALLY HAVE THE SAME BOUNDARIES AS THEY USED TO IN THE OFFICE, OR DO THEY NEED MORE GUIDANCE?

They definitely need more guidance. Oftentimes they forget that there *are* boundaries, and they say things they shouldn't say, do things they shouldn't do. If somebody is dating somebody



in the workplace, there used to be a sense of keeping it private for a while, but now people go public so quickly, and then, three weeks later, they've broken up, and it's a little awkward.

JUST ONE MORE QUESTION, SINCE YOU NOTE ABOUT USING SKYPE: "DON'T STAY ON TOO LONG. REMEMBER THAT MEETINGS ON SKYPE SHOULDN'T GO AS LONG AS FACE-TO-FACE MEETINGS. BEING ON CAMERA CAN BE EXHAUSTING FOR MANY PEOPLE."

Yes—you're always a little concerned with how you're presenting yourself than when you're on the phone.

FACE-TO-FACE SEEMS MORE EXHAUSTING. AND YOU HAVE TO WEAR SHOES.

And underwear.

HOW MUCH DOES BUSINESS ETIQUETTE ACTUALLY CHANGE? DO WE REALLY NEED NEW AND IMPROVED ADVICE?

It's *always* changing. It's like a dictionary in that you're always adding new words and taking out old ones. My first etiquette book came out in 1995, and I barely mention email; there were no smartphones; there was no texting; business casual was discussed, but not in great depth. Fast-forward to now, and technology has taken over; casual dress has taken over. Business dining hasn't really changed—you still hold your knife and fork the same way as thirty years ago, or a hundred years ago. Staying sober is still important. The three-martini lunch has disappeared.

There's the whole area of gender etiquette. We didn't start thinking about how men and women interact in the workplace until the 1970s. All of a sudden, there's a lot more women and a lot more *high-ranked* women. And you take the social rules,

such as who extends their hand, who pays the bill, is it OK for a man to carry a package for a woman—you take all that into the workplace, and there can be consequences that work against both men and women. We *definitely* need some guidelines.

And then there's international etiquette. We have become a global village. You can be on your best American behavior and still offend people and not even know it. With international etiquette, the interesting thing is that the questions are the same wherever you are in the world: what utensils do people use when eating; how do you exchange business cards. The questions are the same. Depending on where you are in the world, the *answers* are different.

SO IT'S NOT SIMPLY THAT EVERYTHING IS MOVING IN THE DIRECTION OF INFORMALITY?

Well, just because we're changing doesn't mean we're getting sloppy.

It doesn't mean we're getting rude. ■