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 WORKPLACE MATTERS
 

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# Don't assume workplace rookies are up to speed on etiquette

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**T**housands of local high school and college graduates will soon be flooding the job market.

While these recent graduates may be armed with academic and technical knowledge, many will unknowingly violate workplace etiquette.



**Robin Onaclea**

An employer, however, expects employees to obey these unwritten rules for behavior. Failing to follow them can lead to a quick exit or create a significant barrier to advancement.

Although workplace expecta-

tions vary widely depending on the culture of the company and particular industry, there are several behaviors that are universal. Many sound like common sense, but local hiring managers say they have difficulty finding applicants that demonstrate them. For example, in a recent survey of Lane County manufacturers conducted by Lane Workforce Partnership, 72 percent of respondents said many of their applicants lack basic employability skills.

So what are some top rules for success in the workplace?

Get along with others. According to Rosie Pryor, vice president of corporate communications at Oregon Community Credit Union, this behavior trumps all others.

"Employers can teach job skills, but it's hard to teach people the basics of good interpersonal relationships. A highly skilled employee who cannot get along with co-workers is a liability. Someone with lesser skills who is a team player is more valued," Pryor said.

Getting along with others requires social skills such as avoiding gossip, not sharing too much personal information, treating co-workers with friendliness and respect, and receiving constructive feedback graciously.

Maintain good attendance and arrive at work on time. A common joke among people in human resources is that the most important tool an employee needs to know how to operate is an alarm clock. Most managers recommend that employees arrive 10 minutes early for their shifts. This is especially critical in any job where there is a shift change.

Don Danielson, staffing selection manager with Hynix Semiconductor, says that a cavalier attitude about attendance is the No. 1 reason new hires are not successful. Hynix, like many other local employers, uses a point system to track tardiness and attendance problems.

As points accumulate, disciplinary consequences occur. Some local employers offer incentives or bonuses for good attendance.

Demonstrate initiative and self-direction. Carol Taylor Clay, organizational development manager at Coach Glass, stresses the importance of being proactive as a new employee. "When you complete an assignment or task, volunteer for a new one. Ask for feedback and seek learning opportunities."

Clay also suggests demonstrating alertness and enthusiasm. This type of behavior lets the company know that the new hire is taking the job seriously.

In conducting job interviews at Hynix, Danielson often asks, "You've completed your work assignments and there are two hours left in the day. What do you do?" The candidate's answer to this question is a good indicator of the individual's level of initiative and motivation.

Be adaptable and flexible. Industries, technologies and markets are changing rapidly. Workplace expectations and skill needs change too. That's why companies are placing a

new emphasis on the value of cross-training. Workers who can cover various job functions are highly valued.

Brian Patch, functional excellence manager at Invitrogen, says that adaptability allows employees to stay competitive in the labor market.

"People entering the work force, as well as those already in careers, need to be able to change and adapt their skills, their work focus and often even their beliefs and opinions about their work, their customers and the value that their work provides to their customers," Patch said.

So, how can businesses support this cadre of young people entering the work force?

- ◆ Clearly communicate your company's expectations to new hires.

- ◆ Don't assume that new employees fully understand the importance of demonstrating these appropriate workplace behaviors. It's OK to address these unwritten rules directly. Consider adding them to your employee handbook or new employee orientation.

- ◆ Assign a seasoned employee who successfully models these behaviors as a mentor.

- ◆ Schedule daily or weekly check-ins to ensure that the new hire is adapting well to your company's culture and expectations.

- ◆ Praise instances of positive behavior and intervene early if there are signs of difficulty.

Helping new hires understand a company's culture and expectations is an investment that will produce dividends.

This new generation of workers will be stronger and more productive because of the company's efforts to help them understand some basics about how to be a good employee.

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*If you have questions about training your work force, contact Robin Onaclea, business services coordinator at Lane Workforce Partnership, at [robino@laneworkforce.org](mailto:robino@laneworkforce.org) or (541) 682-7224.*