



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

Article from:

# The Stepping Stone

January 2008 – Issue 29



# Surefire Strategies to Get on Everyone's Last Nerve

by Maureen Wild

**A**re you working alongside clueless unscrupulous cretins? That's my tagline; the phrase I use when I open my seminars on the topic of workplace etiquette. What is surprising is that I NEVER get a rousing "NO!" when this question is posed. Generally speaking, a conference room full of adults snickers and their heads begin bobbing up and down in affirmation—so what's going on here? Like Elvis, has civility "left the building?"

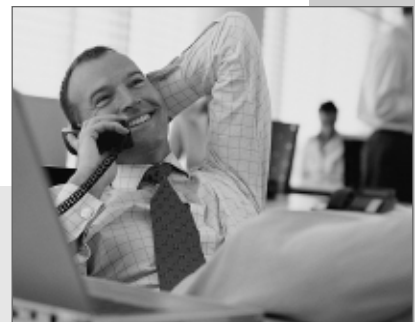
It's easy to alienate people, and you don't have to exert too much effort to win the scorn of your colleagues. The question is, "why would you want to offend the people with whom you spend 40+ hours a week?" Are you hoping to dodge promotions, salary increases, opportunities to represent your firm at high-profile events? Who, in his right mind, WANTS to be perceived as a lout? Unless one is in need of institutionalization or prescription drugs, the obvious answer is, "no one." Nevertheless, day in and day out, there are those among us who persist in demonstrating grating, vexing and irritating behaviors. For those who are clueless as to what these behaviors may be, let me serve up a quick menu of quirks that will estrange even the most stalwart of your workplace associates.

- Cell phone abuses continue to be gross annoyances to others in our workplaces. Let's make something perfectly clear—your personal strife, spousal conflicts, love muffin conversations or bawdy jokes make the rest of us downright uncomfortable. Quite plainly—just shut up already! Personal cell phone use should be restricted to notifying your children of urgent information, requesting that hubby pick up milk and bread on the way home, or explaining why you may be late to dinner. Even running off to a "private" bathroom stall does not give you leave to babble personal information at 60 decibels. Really!

- We are approaching presidential election season (God help us!) and the old chestnut about not talking politics, religion and money needs to be repeated. Sure, a lively respectful conversation seems innocent, but very often what begins as a frank exchange of ideas devolves into a sniping match where both parties leave the discussion angry and unconvinced of the other's point of view. Here's a tip: Don't go there.
- Don't come to work if you are truly sick with a cold, flu or other contagious condition. Stay home and recover so that your colleagues are not exposed to the bugs, bacteria and viruses that will ultimately clobber their immune systems. While you might think that coming to work with the flu is noble, I can assure you that others will not. If you are legitimately sick, stay home until you are well and able to interact with others without contaminating them.
- Be careful to leave a little mystery in your relationship with your workplace associates. The guy or gal in the next cubicle is your colleague NOT your therapist. Blab too much about your personal life and you will sabotage your professional advancement. There's a lot of truth in the notion of "six degrees of separation." The personal information you confided in a co-worker three years ago could come back to bite you today. Keep this in mind—"Everything you speak should be



Maureen Wild is a certified etiquette and ethics trainer with credentials from The Protocol School of Washington and The Josephson Institute of Ethics. You may reach her at: [Maureen@highroadsolutions.com](mailto:Maureen@highroadsolutions.com) or 908.625.8563



(continued on page 24)

### Surefire Strategies to Get on Everyone's Last Nerve ... • from page 23

true, but not every truth must be spoken." Tough it out at work and get a counselor if you have some private, non-workplace-related situation on your mind.

- Carry your own weight. We all have our "off days." Even the heartiest among us cannot be firing on all cylinders at all times. Nevertheless, if you consistently slack off and dump your work on your colleagues, don't anticipate their respect, friendship or cooperation. Pull your own weight and, when possible, be the person that offers to help a colleague complete a project. Step up to the plate, don't step behind it.
- Don't forward spam to your work mates. Let me repeat that. Don't forward spam to your work mates. What does this mean? Resist the urge to hit the forward button on chain letters, goofy jokes and political, environmental or health petitions. Just about everyone is suffering from information overload—you don't want to be

responsible for someone's head exploding from the sheer volume of e-mail he must sort through.

- Be a team player. Duh! How many times have you heard this phrase? So why does it vanish from your consciousness when you are being given kudos on a job well done and you neglect to mention that your co-workers contributed to your success? When you are being praised, share the glory with others to the extent that it is true. If your colleagues perceive you as someone who is not a glory hound, you'll be sitting pretty. Don't pretend that you completed a big project independently if you did not.

Are there other behaviors you can demonstrate that will brand you as a loser? You bet there are, but we will discuss them in future columns. For now, digest the counsel you have read today and be mindful of your responsibility to behave honorably in the workplace. □