

Rules for Cubicle Courtesy

Robert Half International

Cubicles are designed to enhance interaction and help companies maximize space. But because partitioned environments lack privacy, it's critical that cube dwellers develop a healthy respect for their co-workers.

Here are several ways to build strong bonds and foster productivity when working with colleagues in close quarters:

Be a courteous guest.

You'd never barge into another person's house unannounced. Likewise, pretend that cubicles have front doors. Before stepping into a colleague's work area, always knock gently on the side of the entrance. This allows the individual to signal whether he or she can afford to be disturbed at the moment. Consistently show that you respect others' time and privacy, and people will return the favor.

Use your "library voice."

In today's deadline-driven workplace, professionals must be able to concentrate on completing tasks without the constant fear of distraction. And there's nothing quite as annoying as someone whose voice seems to always reach a deafening level. Whenever possible, use a quiet tone so you don't disrupt others.

Stay home with the sniffles.

Suffering from an awful cold or flu? Control those contagions. Do yourself -- and your co-workers -- a favor by staying home until you feel better. If you absolutely must come to work, be considerate and cautious when using communal office equipment. For instance, if you use the photocopier, clean it off with a disinfectant wipe immediately after completing your project.

Have good scents.

Be mindful of your neighbors' noses before you let your tuna casserole waft through the office. Your co-workers may not share your love of Calvin Klein cologne or cranberry-scented candles, either.

Ask before borrowing.

Some people are protective of their office supplies. Respect that. Always ask for permission prior to using someone's stapler or raiding a co-worker's supply of paper clips. What may seem like no big deal to you could be regarded as bothersome or disrespectful to others.

Avoid décor disasters.

Individuality is the spice of life. But err on the side of caution when decorating your workspace. For instance, don't put up potentially offensive calendars or political posters that may alienate others. Also, think twice before posting that beach picture from your Cancun vacation.

Hit the right tune.

You may work best when the music's blasting. But that doesn't mean everyone shares the same strategy. Wear headphones whenever you listen to CDs or the radio. And be sure not to sing or hum along to the chorus; save those melodies for your morning shower.

Avoid phone faux pas.

If you must leave your cell phone on during work hours, make sure that it is always with you and you have a standard, professional-sounding ringtone. Your neighbors might not appreciate being startled by "Dancing Queen" every 20 minutes. In addition, it's rarely appropriate or necessary to use the speakerphone option in a **cubicle** environment.

Be friendly.

In today's fast-paced business environment, we sometimes forget the basics of professionalism. When you are away from your cube and pass someone in the hall, say hello whether they are a friend or stranger. You both work for the same organization and you never know whose assistance you might need some day.

Remember that being a good neighbor is just as important on the job as it is at home. Exhibiting **courtesy**, tact and empathy in the workplace will help you build productive relationships and camaraderie with colleagues.

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