

How can we avoid offending the people we work with?

Case Study: The Daycare?

Barbara quit her job last week. She just couldn't take it anymore. What made her quit? Was it a difficult boss? Was she bored with her work? Did she just feel it was time to move on?

No, no, and no, none of the above. Barbara's boss insisted on bringing his kids to work. Barbara, who had never been around children much felt uncomfortable around them. Her boss refused to leave the kids at home so Barbara found another job. Her boss's disrespect for her pushed Barbara over the edge.

Unfortunately, disrespect for one's co-workers (or subordinates) isn't that uncommon. And it often causes people to leave their jobs. For employers this means losing good people, and then having to hire and train new ones. For co-workers it means having to get used to working with new people, and picking up the slack until new employees can be found. The saddest part of the lack of respect in the workplace is that many people don't realize they are being disrespectful. They aren't trying to hurt someone's feelings. They just aren't trying to not do that. Barbara's boss, for example, was doing what he felt was best for his kids. He thought leaving them at home in the afternoons was boring for them. He may have even felt that his employees would enjoy having the kids there. He didn't consider the negative effect the kids might have on someone.

The Actions to Avoid

Let's take a look now at actions that may offend your co-workers (in no particular order).

- Having loud telephone conversations
- Not cleaning up after yourself in the staff kitchen
- Showing up late for meetings
- Looking at a co-worker's computer screen over his or her shoulder
- Taking supplies from a co-worker's desk
- Neglecting to say please and thank you
- Wearing too much perfume
- Coming to work sick or infectious
- Taking the last of something without replacing it
- Talking behind someone's back
- Asking someone to lie for you
- Blaming someone else when you are at fault
- Taking credit for someone else's work
- Asking a subordinate to do something unrelated to work, i.e. run errands
- Trying to convert others to your political or religious beliefs
- Opening someone else's mail
- Sending unwanted email
- Telling offensive jokes
- Smoking in common areas
- Not pulling your own weight
- Complaining about the company, boss and co-workers
- Having a condescending attitude toward others