

## Employers train staff on how to behave in the office amid the push to return

By Hailey Mensik, July 26, 2023



As more employees return to offices, their employers are realizing some are rustier than expected when it comes to their understanding of how to behave in the workplace.

Many worked from home for the past few years outside the demands of office norms (especially related to how they present themselves), and younger workers who started remotely might not even have had a full-time in-office experience yet.

It turns out that employees need refreshers on how to do such things as hold workplace conversations, dress appropriately, take lunch breaks and even make eye contact, business leaders said in a survey conducted this month by ResumeBuilder.com.

Almost half of the survey's more than 1,500 respondents who hold executive or management titles at companies with 11 or more employees said they're currently offering etiquette classes, and another 18% said they plan to roll out training programs by next year.

"Being considerate of other people is really what this comes down to," said Kate Zabriskie, owner of Business Training Works Inc., a company that provides professionalism training courses for employers. "People need guidelines and some standards so they know what to do," she said. Her company was not involved in the survey.

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Some major consulting firms have implemented the training for younger staff, like KPMG, according to reporting from the Wall Street Journal, as well as Deloitte and PwC, according to reporting from the Financial Times.

Ironically, companies have also had to train staff on how to act while working virtually, including new courtesies like getting their cameras on during Zoom meetings and discouraging non-work multitasking.

Across all age groups, the top workplace skill employees returning to the office need to work on is having appropriate workplace conversations, the survey found. That includes using discretion when talking about politics or religion, taking other people’s beliefs into consideration and treating people with respect and empathy. It also includes learning how to make polite and appropriate eye contact.

Dressing appropriately is another skill often covered in employer etiquette training courses. But work appropriate style has evolved amid the pandemic. As a result, more employers are relaxing expectations for some style choices like visible tattoos, Zabriskie said.

### **Is this a Gen Z problem?**

Younger Gen Z workers in particular are being targeted to work on their professionalism. Of the survey respondents who said training will be required for only some employees, more than half said they’d require new college graduates or employees younger than 25 to do the programs.

Leaders in the survey lamented that, while Gen Z workers have technical skills, they are struggling with soft skills — a concern other experts have noted as more people from that age group enter the workforce.

Gen Z workers are largely competent at using office equipment like computer software, though not as great at taking constructive criticism and keeping controversial topics out of work conversations, respondents said in the survey.

“Especially if your first two years at work were at your house, some of that natural socialization that would have occurred just didn’t,” Zabriskie said. “But I will say that we see problems at all levels.”