

Office newbie's manners need a remake

By Joyce Lain Kennedy CAREERS NOW

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Telegram.com
November 23, 2014



Q: A June college graduate is grating on everyone's nerves. Big time! Among the young coworker's irritating actions: He eats lunch at his desk, stinking up the office, rather than eating it in the lunch room. He turns his cellphone ring way up, maybe because it plays his favorite rock band. He wanders into co-workers' cubicles and walks off with any supplies he needs, and a dozen other irritating things.

A couple of us have tried to speak privately with the newbie about his outrageous behavior, but he laughed it off, implying that we are artifacts and that times have changed. Is this a case for our manager, who is on a different floor, or for a co-workers committee? What have others recommended as the best way to deal with this predicament? — K.L.L.

A: Some of the ideas floated over the years to deal with a neophyte office pest are unprintable. But here's an admittedly sneaky move that may be kinder than immediately fingering the newbie's unacceptable behavior to his boss:

Locate and print three online articles such as "Office Etiquette: Tips to Overcome Bad Manners at Work" by Lisa Quast at Forbes.

Highlight the offender's transgressions on each article. Anonymously place the trio of articles on the offender's desk one morning before the office opens. If the newbie asks about your complicity in the surprise package, merely smile and say, "If the shoe fits, wear it."

But if the problem employee doesn't take the non-too-subtle hint, your manager will have to deliver the wake-up call.

Q: My boss, a high-powered wonder boy, hired me as the junior member of his team a year ago. But now the word is floating that my mentor is on his way out, leaving me wondering what to do: start looking around or hang in and hope? — M.A.

A: Perhaps your mentor has another position waiting in the wings and can take his team along: it's time for straight talk. Office gossip is one thing; facts are what you need.

Q: I've been top salesman where I work for nearly two years. Now I've been offered a sales manager's job. I've read that being good at sales doesn't mean you'll be good at sales management, and vice versa.

My uncle says that companies may not make another offer if you reject the first one and that some people later come to regret their rejection of advancement. Further, that those who accept advancement are sometimes surprised to find that they prefer managing to doing.

When I resigned from a job three months ago, I was still owed seven vacation days. Is it too late to collect equivalent pay, or should I just write the days off and move on? — M.M.

A: Unless you want to spend lots of time trying to unwind your options, you can simply say to your former supervisor, "Because you've always been fair, I know you'll understand why I'm asking about —." And hope for the best.

The biggest takeaway: The next time you depart a job, immediately find out what benefits may be owed you for such items as severance pay (if you're leaving involuntarily), vacation and other accumulated time-off days, retirement fund dollars and insurance benefits.

Q: What's a quick window on a company's willingness to hire older employees? — K.G.

A: Here's a clue from Mark Mehler, a principal at CareerXroads (careerxroads.com): Watch recruitment videos posted on the company's website. Age markers include what employees wear to work and whether there's plentiful gray hair or a lack of it. Additionally, Mehler advises, use your personal networks to "ask around."

Q: Now in my 50s with 24 years' service in my company, I've recently seen lawyers and consultants around the hallways. Does this mean what I think it means? — N.L.

A: Probably. It likely means your company is acquiring or merging with another, or being sold.

(Email your career questions for possible use in this column to Joyce Lain Kennedy at jlk@sunfeatures.com>jlk@sunfeatures.com; use "Reader Question" for subject line.)

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