

BY GARY M. SMITH
Senior Member, Houston Chapter

ELEVEN COMMANDMENTS FOR BUSINESS MEETING ETIQUETTE

Here's a knee-slapper: What did the employee say when his boss asked why he missed a recent meeting?

Answer: "Sorry, I had to get some actual work done."

What's that? I don't hear you laughing. Could be that your sense of humor has been worn down sitting through endless presentations, disorganized gripe sessions, or business meetings where key players showed up late, if at all.

Personally, I think the business world could borrow a page from the book of Emily Post, the maven of politeness and etiquette. A good business meeting is one where all the players show courtesy and respect. This approach conveys a simple message: We're all professionals here, so let's have a productive meeting.

Recently, I researched the topic of business meeting etiquette but found virtually no established rules on holding courteous meetings. So I've gathered what I've learned from my own experience into the eleven commandments listed below.

These are by no means the final word. If you have thoughts on meeting etiquette, please send them to intercom@stc-va.org.

1. **R.S.V.P.** When asked via phone, e-mail, or electronic calendar to attend a business meeting, be sure to reply if a reply is requested. Some meetings are structured and spaces secured on the basis of expected attendance.
2. **Arrive Early.** If this is not possible, arrive at the scheduled time at the latest—but never late. Do not assume that the beginning of a meeting will be delayed until all those planning to attend are present. If you arrive late, you risk miss-

ing valuable information and lose the chance to provide your input. Also, you should not expect others to fill you in during or after the meeting; everyone is busy, and those who were conscientious enough to arrive on time should not have to recap the meeting for you.

3. **Come Prepared.** Always bring something to write on as well as to write with. Meetings usually are called to convey information, and it is disruptive to ask others for paper and pen if you decide to take notes. If you know you will be presenting information, ensure that your handouts, view foils, *PowerPoint* slides, etc., are organized and ready.
4. **Do Not Interrupt.** Hold your comments to the speaker until the meeting has adjourned or until the speaker asks for comments, unless, of course, the speaker has encouraged open discourse throughout the meeting. Also, do not interrupt other attendees. Hold your comments to others in the meeting until after the meeting is adjourned. Conversation during a meeting is disruptive to other attendees and inconsiderate of the speaker.
5. **Abstain from Electronics.** As the notice posted at the beginning of films in movie theaters requests, "Please silence cell phones and pagers." Activate voice mail if you have it, or forward messages to another phone.
6. **Speak in Turn.** When asking a question, it usually is more appropriate to raise your hand than to blurt out your question. Other attendees may have questions, and the speaker needs to acknowledge everyone.

7. **Keep Your Questions Brief.** When asking questions, be succinct and clear. If your question is detailed, break it into parts or several questions. But be sure to ask only one question at a time; others may have questions as well.
8. **Pay Attention.** Listen to the issues the speaker addresses, the questions from the attendees, and the answers provided. You do not want to waste meeting time asking a question that has already been asked.
9. **Be Patient and Calm.** Do not fidget, drum your fingers, tap your pen, flip through or read materials not concerning the meeting, or otherwise act in a disruptive manner.
10. **Attend the Entire Meeting.** Leave only when the meeting is adjourned. Leaving before the end of the meeting—unless absolutely necessary and unless you have prior permission—can be disruptive to other attendees and inconsiderate of the speaker.
11. **Respond to Action Items.** After the meeting, be sure to complete any tasks assigned to you as expeditiously as possible; file your meeting notes or any formalized minutes for later review or to prepare for future meetings. **1**

Gary M. Smith is founder of Chatgris Press in New Orleans. Titles include The Peer-Reviewed Journal, Coffee and Coffeehouses, The Complete Guide to Driving Etiquette, Publishing for Small Press Runs, and Guided Meditation. Gary can be contacted at P.O. Box 15092, New Orleans, LA 70175-5092, (504) 895-5219, or at gsmith@comm.net.