

## 7:10 Interacting with Co-Workers

It should be evident by now that people within an office or business must work with others. It is a rare position that has no contact with co-workers. Communication between individuals within the working environment is essential. There are a few pointers to remember:

- **Respect must be earned**—As you work with others and show them your integrity, your responsibility, and your dependability, their respect for you will increase. However, you must also remember that to get respect you must give respect.
- **Keep personal business private**—Do not involve your personal life in the workplace.
- **Maintain a clean work area**—Not only does this make the environment more organized, it also makes it more safe. In addition, cleaning up after yourself makes it easier on everyone who works with you.
- **Respect your co-worker's space**—Sometimes even the little things will cause a disruption or hard feelings between co-workers. Don't assume because there's a pen on someone's desk that you are free to use it. Ask before you use anything that is assigned to another.
- **Be pleasant to others**—No one likes to be around someone who is grumpy or negative all the time. Look at the bright side and have a "We can" attitude. Don't forget to smile and say "please" and "thank you." And watch your tone of voice: do not show anger or sarcasm to try to belittle another person.

## 7:10b Interacting with Co-Workers

- **Be an example to others and learn from others who have good work habits**—Breaking company rules or ignoring policy, no matter how small the infraction, is never a good idea.
- **Do not blame others for your mistakes**—Take responsibility for anything that you do, or don't do.
- **Use positive rather than negative body language with others:**
  - Negative signals that communicate nervousness, insecurity, frustration, anger, or defensiveness: eyes rolling up, shrugs, crossed arms, sideways glances, checking the time, frowning, fidgeting, biting fingernails, chewing pens or pencils, hissing, pointing a finger, tapping or twitching a foot.
  - Positive body language presents you as a person of confidence, cooperation, and openness. These signals include standing up straight, smiling, leaning slightly forward, alertness, listening to the speaker, and eye contact.
- **Learn to shake hands**—Your handshake also tells people about you. It should neither be bone crunching, nor weak or limp. Grasp the person's offered hand in a firm, but not overpowering, grip; give a brief squeeze and one or two up and down shakes (not too fast, not too vigorous); make eye contact; and release. Your handshake should tell people you are confident, but not intimating or aggressive.
- **Listening is important in any communication**—Learn to maintain eye contact and show interest. Do not interrupt, but give appropriate feedback, and paraphrase from time to time to make sure you understand.

(Some of this information is taken from *A Teenager's Guide to the Workplace*, by Karen S. Hinds, New Books Publishing, Massachusetts, 2001)