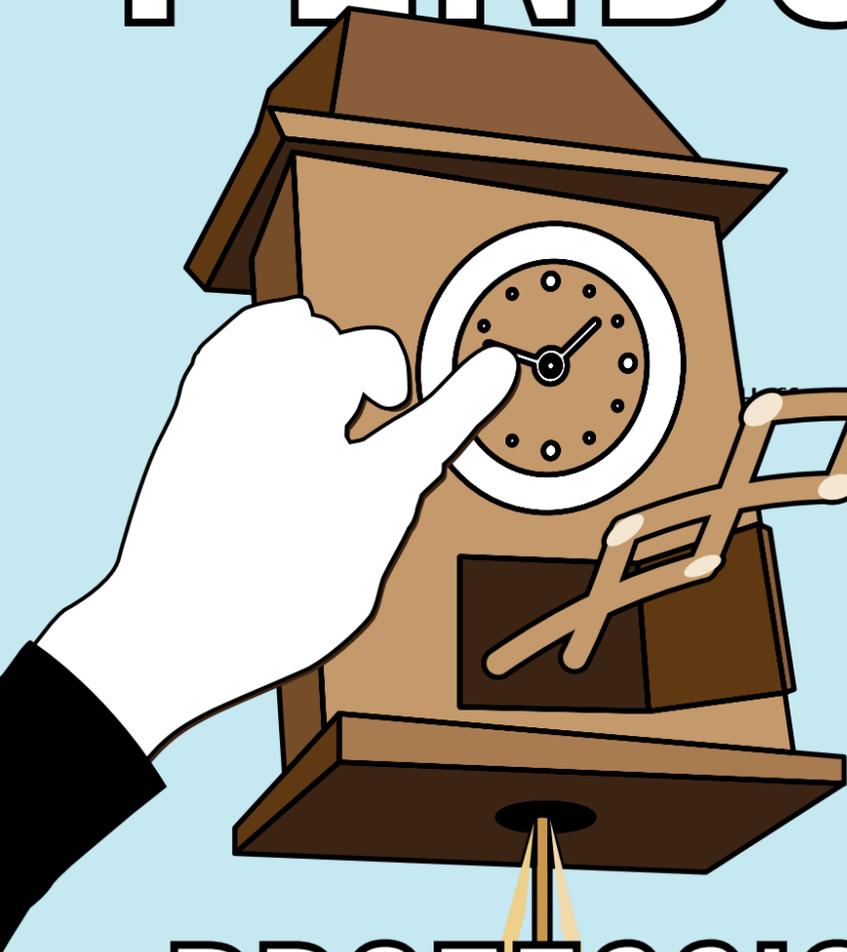
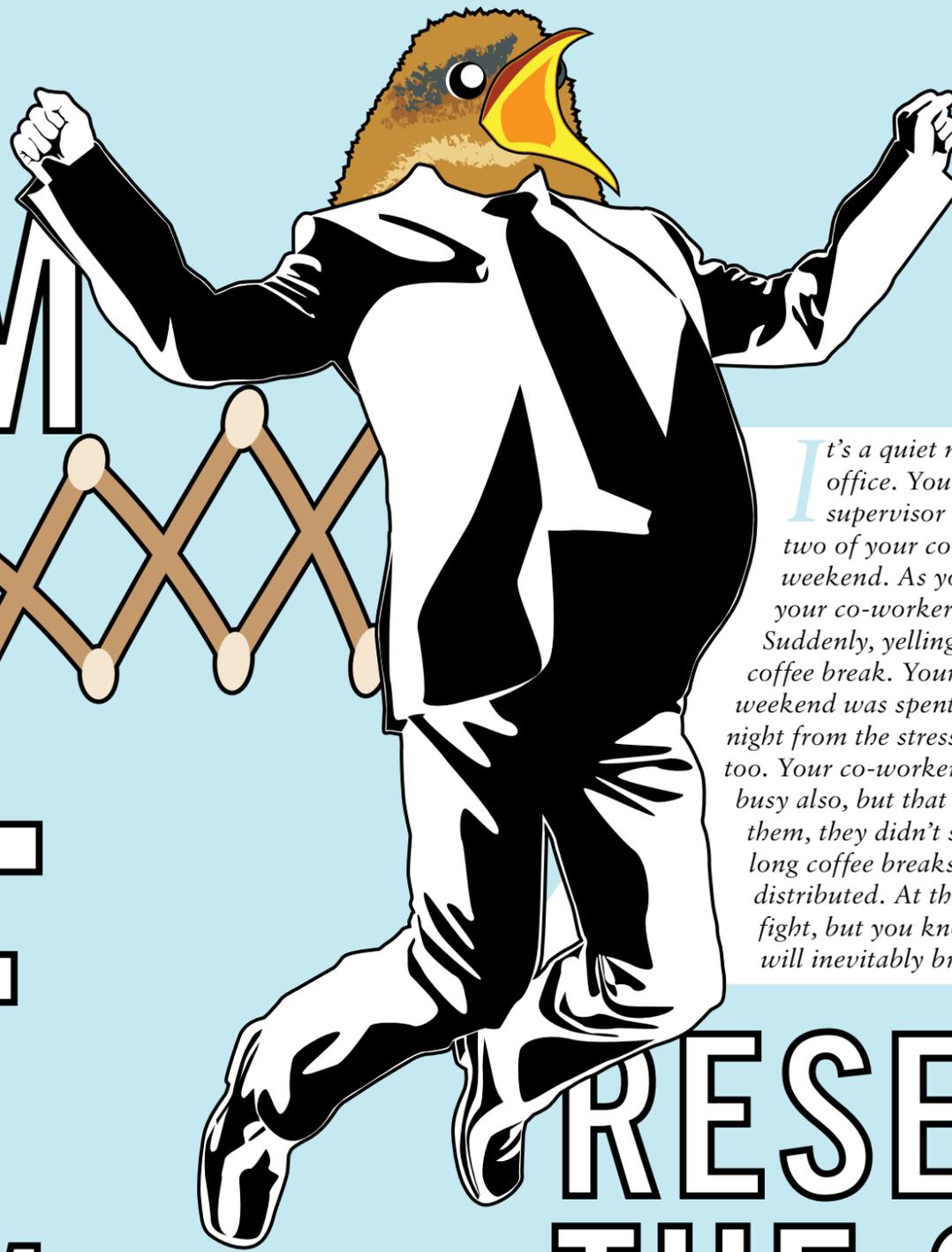


PENDULUM



OF



It's a quiet morning in the coffee shop near your office. You've just stopped in for your latté and your supervisor stomps in behind you. Behind her are two of your co-workers, chatting rapidly about their weekend. As you're putting sugar in your coffee, you hear your co-workers ask your supervisor about her weekend. Suddenly, yelling disrupts the calm atmosphere of your coffee break. Your supervisor heatedly complains that her weekend was spent at work. She's so busy she can't sleep at night from the stress. Now she has to work all next weekend, too. Your co-workers try to sympathize by saying they're very busy also, but that only irritates your boss. If she accuses them, they didn't spend so much time gossiping and taking long coffee breaks, maybe her work would be more evenly distributed. At this point, all you want to do is escape the fight, but you know that you can't because your co-workers will inevitably bring it to the office.

PROFESSIONALISM

RESETTING THE CLOCK TO CIVIL

by Ruth Hoffman

The parameters of office etiquette are, in many ways, the same as they have always been. Basic, yet vital, rules still apply: speak consciously and civilly with your team members, dress professionally, respect your co-worker's privacy. But we've all had the experience of an angry co-worker who cannot manage their stress and vents it on everyone. We've all experienced a boss who sends cryptic e-mails and then blames someone else when a project is not done right. We've had moments when the office gossip becomes too much to handle. In addition, now our online personalities, on Facebook and Twitter for example, are often inextricably linked with our real-life personalities, giving us yet another task to manage.

What are some useful methods for engaging professionally with your co-workers in and out of the office? And how do you address the seemingly simple dilemmas like

whether or not you should attend the baby shower for Janice in accounting when you don't even know her. Or what to do when your boss "friends" you on Facebook and you don't feel comfortable accepting the request?

Suzanne Nourse, owner of The Protocol School of Ottawa in Ottawa, Ontario and co-author of *The Power Of Civility*, strongly believes that the pendulum of office etiquette has swung to the extreme and that we must re-

examine and reinstate standards of office etiquette.

"We have to have zero tolerance for incivility in the office. Rudeness, gossip-

homes. Most likely, many factors have contributed to the shift away from professionalism in the office. It's time for a swing back in the direction of civility.

Following are several guidelines you can use to help maintain professional relationships with your co-workers.

Understand Different Styles Of Communication

In her book *You Just Don't Understand: Men and Women in Conversation* Deborah Tannen distinguishes men's style "report talk" and women's style "rapport talk."

Report talkers inform and instruct while rapport talkers share and build connection.

We've all met both types and Tannen is careful to point out that these styles do not always fall within the gender specific framework. Nonetheless, different styles of communicating can create dams at work and muddy the waters surrounding office etiquette. Understanding the vari-

ous ways of communicating frees you to change the way you communicate instead of placing blame when miscommunication occurs.

Nourse points out that the smart person in the office, the one who wants to get ahead, knows that there are different communication styles. If you want to communicate with your detail-oriented boss, you're going to change your communication style to theirs and give them details, details and more



Suzanne Nourse, owner of The Protocol School of Ottawa in Ottawa, Ontario and co-author of *The Power Of Civility* offers three simple principles to build your own set of civility guideline for the office. They sound similar to what your grandma used to preach.

- 1. Treat people the way you wish to be treated.**
- 2. If you break it, fix it.**
- 3. Respect people's space and privacy.**

For more about office etiquette, visit Nourse's website at www.etiquetteottawa.com

ing and berating people publicly must not be tolerated," Nourse says.

What started this pendulum swinging toward unprofessionalism in the office? Perhaps it began with the advent of casual Fridays. Or maybe a careless use of texting language in office communication has caused confusion and disrespect. According to Nourse, we are also dealing with a couple of generations for whom etiquette has not been emphasized in schools or in

details.

Jackie Beeler, the receptionist for Peterson Sullivan LLP—an accounting firm in Seattle, Washington—handles miscommunication by using direct communication to address concerns with co-workers. And, she says, “human resource departments can help by educating staff of all ages on the norms of contact in and out of the office.”

Due to the increasing global reach of many companies, Nourse also encourages sensitivity to multi-cultural differences in communication. A hand-gesture or facial expression that means one thing in Western culture could mean something totally different in Asian or Latin American cultures. If you sense that a miscommunication has occurred, it’s up to you to address the situation.

Consider a policy of not adding co-workers as Facebook friends or Twitter subscribers.

Keep Your Online Presence Out Of Your Office Life

According to Nourse, some companies now request that, if their employees have a personal Facebook page, they don’t post where they work. Some large companies also hire people to monitor their employees’ profiles and newsfeeds on Facebook and Twitter. If someone has a positive or negative comment, having a monitor for these sites allows a company to respond in an appropriate way. These top-down approaches to promoting professionalism are important. Nourse advocates on-site etiquette training for HR departments and

employees alike, but she also stresses that each individual is responsible for what they post, tweet and upload.

If you are linked to your office via your website, blog, Facebook page or Twitter, the pictures you upload and the one-liners you post to Twitter are going to be seen by co-workers, your human resources department and possibly even your manager. One possible option is to have two profiles or Twitter accounts—one for work and one for your personal life. But if that seems like too much work, consider a policy of not adding co-workers as Facebook friends or Twitter subscribers. When they ask, explain that you have a personal policy not to combine your personal and professional life via your social media sites.

Set Guidelines And Use Them Consistently With Co-workers And Bosses

Have a set of guidelines on how you’ll respond when you’re asked to host the office Christmas party at your house or how much you’re willing to pitch in for the group baby shower gift—for the third baby shower of the year. If you’re able to adopt the same response consistently, regardless of the people involved, you’re much less likely to create a situation where one person feels slighted. It’s also beneficial to respond to conflict in a consistent way.

Nourse suggests using humor to diffuse the situation or extract yourself from conversations where you feel uncomfortable, such as when a co-worker starts gossiping about your boss. Although it’s important to recognize that each conflict is unique, approaching disagreements in the same manner can reduce stress and bolster professionalism during the solution process.

You could approach the person you’re in conflict with first, or maybe you speak with your human resources department about the best steps to address the situation. Or, you can resolve to always take a day to reassess the situation before you address it with the people involved. Nourse strongly encourages companies create written

guidelines for staff and managers to follow. Whatever methods you develop, stick with them. Consistency will keep you calm in high-pressure situations and will allow others to know what to expect when approaching you with a concern.

Manage Your Stress Outside The Office So You Don’t Have To Manage It At The Office

Stress often originates in our life outside the office. Misplaced stress reactions, when taken to the office, erupt out of context. Nourse puts it simply. “When you get to work, park your bad mood outside.”

You are responsible for what you tell your co-workers and, as you cannot control how they will respond to what you say, it’s good practice to keep your interactions light while still giving personal tidbits that connect you to others. Instead of talking about the fight you had with your spouse or about your child’s problems at school, share a funny story about the antics of your new pet or about your upcoming vacation plans. If you habitually elevate your conversations at the office, it’s easier not to stay stuck in the personal stresses that are common in everyone’s lives. Not only does the office culture benefit, but you benefit knowing that your time at the office will be uplifting.

Many of us spend 40 hours a week, or more, in the office with our co-workers. It is vital that we recognize the role of etiquette in fostering safe, productive environments in which to work and create.

“It makes sense, on a business and personal level, to enjoy your work and enjoy the people that you work with,” says Beeler.

Professionalism in the office serves to positively enhance our interactions with co-workers so that we can fully enjoy the time spent at the office.

About the author:

Ruth Hoffman has a degree in English and is currently pursuing an associate degree in biotechnology. In her spare time, she’s a freelancer with a passion for creative writing.