

Missed manners

Don't overlook the soft skills

In our second article of our series geared toward enhancing career and social performance in a digitalized age, we are going to discuss what is known in the recruitment industry as "soft skills"—better known



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as interpersonal skills, etiquette or just plain old manners.

Too often, a candidate goes through an extensive interview process and does not get the job due to a lack of attention to soft detail—perhaps he failed to send a timely thank you note after his meeting. Perhaps he failed to maintain eye contact.

Soft skills are about paying acute attention to detail and combining these skills with your concrete skillsets. The candidate who offers the better soft skills will likely get the job, despite nearly identical practical experience.

In an age of technology, experts offer advice regarding the details that could make or break your chances of seeing an interview through to job fruition:

While you may be tempted, for example, to turn your cell phone to "silent" or "vibrate" during an interview in order to be polite, nothing could be further from the truth. In reality, simply being in possession

of a cellular device during an interview says one thing and one thing only: I'm expecting someone more important than you to call.

Know that a phone call, even a silent one, will disrupt the flow of your interview and cause you to break eye contact in order to see who's calling. Also, the sound of the vibration will disrupt your concentration. Experts advise turning off the device and leaving it in the car.

The farther you go in the interview process, the more people you will meet. Odds are that one or more of these meetings will take place in a restaurant. There's a reason for this. Your potential boss wants to see your table manners in action. Common sense dictates that you chew with your mouth closed, but did you know that your every decision and action is being measured? There are several "don'ts" to remember when you're in a restaurant on business:

- **Don't drink alcohol.** Should your companion be insistent, limit yourself to one drink and take small sips.
- **Don't order any food that is messy.** That barbeque sandwich will invariably end up on your tie or your shirt and your hands will get sticky.
- **Don't order the most expensive item on the menu.**
- **Don't belch.**



Today's technology-minded world has brought with it lightning-speed decision-making. While the old rule of writing a thank-you note for an interviewer's time still applies, snail mail is simply that; by the time your thank you letter arrives, the decision about who goes to the next round of interviews may already have been made.

Immediately following your interview, send a thank you e-mail, expressing your gratitude for the time spent as well as your interest in the position. Should you desire, a hand-written note is an appropriate follow-up measure.

Further, remember to always be on time for your interview. Tardiness could be considered as a sign of arrogance.

Once you have the audience, your attention to grooming will surely be scrutinized. Keeping your hair trimmed and your shoes shined could be the details that edge you out over your competition.

Remember, your experience and skillsets got you the interview; it's the finishing touches that could land you the job. 

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Five to help you thrive

The five critical business relationships every entrepreneur must nurture

by Ty Freyvogel

Entrepreneurs, here are the five most critical relationships to focus on ... and why your efforts with these people and organizations can make or break your business:

Customers. Of course, any business owner wants his customers to be happy. But you need to ask yourself, Am I really going that extra mile to ensure that my customers have the ultimate positive experience? Particularly if you're a small business owner, your customers are your bread and butter. Not only do you want them to be so happy with your service that they come back, you also want them to go tell someone else that they loved the experience they had with your business.

Employees. The importance of seeking out the most dedicated, honest, and passionate employees you can find can't be

stressed enough. After all, you have to trust these people to serve your customers, protect your brand, and help your company grow. When you have found the best employees for your business, do everything in your power to hold on to them. Your employees are the face of your organization when you aren't there. So they must feel like they have a stake in the business. Encourage a sense of ownership among your employees. There's no better way to keep them happy than by giving them the recognition they deserve. Have one-on-one conversations with each of your employees on a regular basis to let them share their problems with you and to give you a chance to recognize their good work.

Vendors. It's important to nurture relationships with those people who aren't necessarily working for you but who service you or your company regularly. This can mean anyone from the package delivery guy who stops by every day to the materials supplier who keeps your warehouse stocked to the designer who keeps your Web site updated. Think of your ven-

dors as "honorary employees". Show them that you appreciate what they do for you and also that you care about them and their companies. Get their e-mail addresses and cell phone numbers and stay in touch with them. You never know when an emergency might arise in which you could use their help. If you already have a good relationship with them, they will be more willing to give you extra time and to work with you to get back on track.

Bankers. At the beginning of your venture, it's likely that you will require a start-up loan of some kind. Therefore, the best way to nurture your banker is to make sure you always have enough money in your account to make your monthly loan payments on time. With my businesses, I always made sure I had some emergency cash saved up to use in case I had a rough month. You don't want to gain a reputation with your bank as someone who doesn't make loan payments on time. Staying close to your bankers can also help you secure your finances. Make sure you set up a safety system with them to ensure that all of your deposits are going through on

time.

Mentors. It's great to have someone to go to when you are first starting your own business and when you run into problems along the way once it is up and running. Find a successful fellow entrepreneur whom you respect and ask her to be your mentor. Always show her the respect she deserves and let her know you are thankful for her help. It's also a great idea to put your mentor on your business's advisory board.

Here's the bottom line: no matter how determined, hardworking, and talented you may be, you simply can't be a successful entrepreneur all by yourself. It takes a village to run a company. Never forgetting that fact is critical to your success. 

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