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Isaac M. O'Bannon • Aug. 05, 2014

It may be lonely at the top, but poor manners might be at least partially to blame, according to a recent survey by professional staffing firm Accountemps. More than eight in 10 (85 percent) survey respondents said being courteous to coworkers has an impact on a person's career prospects. However, 70 percent of workers think people become less courteous as they climb the corporate ladder.

Among the rank and file, open office spaces also may give rise to bad manners. When employees were asked to name the biggest breach of workplace etiquette in this type of office environment, using a speakerphone or talking loudly on the phone topped the list (36 percent); loitering or talking around a colleague's desk ranked second (23 percent).

The survey was developed by Accountemps, the world's first and largest specialized staffing service for temporary accounting, finance and bookkeeping professionals, and conducted by an independent research firm. It includes responses from more than 450 employees 18 years of age and older who work in an office environment in the United States.

Workers were asked, "In your opinion, to what extent does being courteous to coworkers positively impact a person's career prospects?" Their responses:

- Greatly, it can accelerate advancement = 44%
- Somewhat, but skills play a bigger role = 41%
- No impact at all, it's who or what you know = 14%

- Don't know = 1%

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Workers also were asked, "Which one of the following do you consider to be the biggest breach of workplace etiquette when working in an open office space?" Their responses:

- Using a speakerphone or talking loudly on the phone = 36%
- Loitering or talking around a colleague's desk = 23%
- Eating foods that have strong odors = 15%
- Keeping a messy or cluttered workspace = 14%
- Leaving the phone ringer on loud = 8%
- Don't know/can't choose just one = 4%
- Something else = 1%

"Workplace etiquette is about being aware of how your actions affect those around you," said Max Messmer, chairman of Accountemps and author of Managing Your Career For Dummies (John Wiley & Sons, Inc.). "Time constraints and external pressures aren't excuses for bad behavior. While it takes more than just good manners to rise through the ranks, displaying professional courtesy will only help your career. Open office spaces foster better collaboration, but employees should make sure their actions aren't keeping others from doing their jobs."

Robert Half, parent company of Accountemps, has produced videos illustrating poor workplace etiquette as part of the firm's ongoing video series, "Don't Let This Happen to You."

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