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*By Dee DePass, Minneapolis Star Tribune.*  
(via TNS)

Let's face it. We all lost at least some of our office savvy during the pandemic.

We were working in yoga pants, slippers, pajamas. We took the occasional — or daily — nap. We had nonstop access to the fridge and could turn off our cameras when we were eating (sometimes loudly).

Now that most of us are back in the office at least part of the week, we're realizing

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While most of us offered grace as we all returned, that time is over, said Juliet Mitchell, founder of the Life Etiquette Institute in St. Paul.

To help us all to avoid becoming *that person*, we turned to career counselors, professors and etiquette pros to get some tips on office etiquette.

## Be personable

With the pandemic gone, so is our cloak of privacy and isolation. So remember that a little eye contact, a quick hallway greeting or even a handshake go a long way toward re-establishing polite rapport.

“But remember. If you are going to acknowledge one person, you have to acknowledge everyone. Be conscious and aware to include people who may not be in your inner circle,” Mitchell said.

Martha Hoffman, a senior development officer at the Minnesota Historical Society, said the pandemic hit her workplace hard. There were employee departures, furloughs, and then a quick hiring boom.

“Suddenly I found I really didn't know who everybody was in the elevator,” Hoffman said. “So one of the things we all started doing was putting our faces on our emails so that we could know [who was who at work]. We really had to dig in and made an effort to reacquaint ourselves with people again.”

Nan Gesche, who teaches communication studies at the University of Minnesota, said it's not just the pandemic that thwarted people's ability to relate to each other at work and talk face to face.

“My students almost never interact face to face,” Gesche said. “They come into class. They sit down, and they're all on their phones. ... And when I do talk to them, they

don't always look [at] you face to face.”

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Even if you just respond “Got it,” that’s OK, she and others said.

She recently took a long bike ride with a group of accountants from across the country. They talked about recent hires and how they didn’t understand email etiquette — or even that they needed to show up to work at a specific time.

The Gen Z accountants incorrectly assumed they just needed to put in their hours, not know office rules, she said.

## Hybrid meetings still have rules

Human resources managers we spoke to advised returning employees to turn off cellphones and defer to the person speaking during meetings. For Zoom and Teams meetings, turn on your camera so participants can see that you are engaged. Mute your sound until needed.

And try not to eat during calls unless it’s clearly a lunchtime zoom gathering.

As far as reinforcing inclusive cultures, we’re coming up on religious holidays such as Ramadan when co-workers could be fasting.

“You want to be respectful,” said Liz Hruska, a career counselor at the University of Minnesota’s College of Continuing and Professional Studies.

Gesche, who conducts communications workshops for various chambers of commerce, coaches managers and business owners to take a deep breath during meetings. Make a point to listen during meetings, not just talk.

“Instead of listening, we interject our response, our reaction, our suggestions before the other person is even finished,” she said. It’s such a common problem that in her university classes, “I make them actually do multiple activities where we practice. We

practice problem statements, paraphrasing, asking questions. When we get done,

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might do their best work at home.

Hruska once had a boss who regularly sent emails at 11 at night. "It stressed me out. I felt I was obligated to respond immediately," or would not be perceived as a good worker, she said.

Now Hruska and her own staffers discuss their email preferences. One person made it clear she works best late at night and so is likely to email but never expects an answer until business hours resume. (Reminder: You can schedule the emails.)

Have that conversation first, Hruska said. If people know each other's preferences, it sets expectations and calms nerves, she said.

## **Know what 'professional' means in your workplace**

Casual might mean different things in different workplaces. But at minimum, Mitchell of Life Etiquette Institute suggests watching your language and even if jeans are acceptable, taking time to be well-groomed.

"Casual does not mean sloppy," Mitchell said. Tank tops and flip-flops are generally not office attire. "Put your best foot forward so you can claim your seat at the table. When you are at the table, you are better positioned for success."

That also means washing those dishes and putting them back in your lunchbox or drawer and observing what fellow workers are doing before shouting across the room to a colleague. Someone could be on an important call.

Mitchell is seeing an increased need for her etiquette services these days. Several business clients confessed seeing post-pandemic attire that made them gawk.

"There's this rolling of the eyes with employers asking, 'Do I really have to tell them what to wear? You mean I have to address this?' The answer is yes. They have to,"

Mitchell said. “Employers need to come to the table and say, ‘Hey we are coming back

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She also encourages managers and human resources professionals to communicate the standards — both to remind people and to create that inclusive culture.

“Employers don’t want to address problems but have to agree on respect and how we are going to move forward,” Mitchell said.

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