

Business Briefing: are our standards dropping in the workplace?

Written by Jenni Henderson, Editor, Business and Economy, The Conversation



How should you signal that you don't want to be disturbed? www.shutterstock.com

Our workplaces are becoming less formal as the decor resembles what we have at home, companies relax dress codes, and technology makes it possible to work from anywhere.

But the old formality had some advantages, says Libby Sander from Bond University. For example, closed doors used to signal that you didn't want to be disturbed, and suits are an easy way to look professional.

As Sander points out, new forms of office etiquette, such as not disturbing someone wearing headphones, are filling this void.

To know how to behave in this new relaxed environment, context matters, says Nicole Gillespie, an associate professor of management at the University of Queensland. This means reading the relationships you have with your co-workers and the wider culture in the office, and being aware of the effect your own actions are having.

Never is this more important than in cases of office profanity. It's not uncommon to hear a bit of swearing in some workplaces, but it could get you fired in certain circumstances. As part of [the Fair Work Commission ruling](#), the difference comes down to swearing in conversation, versus directly at someone.

"There's a big difference between that coarse kind of conversation and aggression in someone's tone of voice, so you've got to ask what the intention is," says Simon Burgess, from the University of New England.

Burgess says it's up to each of us to hone our communication skills and perhaps improve our office etiquette a bit.

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