

TULSA WORLD

Summer no time for etiquette to take vacation

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Thursday, July 16, 2009
7/16/2009 4:23:35 AM

With summer's sizzling heat, it's tempting to push the "business casual" envelope too far or to let your social manners fizzle at the annual company picnic. But business etiquette can't afford to take a vacation — business is still business. Whether meeting with clients or attending an outdoor company outing, you still want to make a positive impression.

Here are 10 ways to keep a polished professional image this summer — when dressing for work or picnicking with co-workers:

- Amp it up a notch! "Business casual" can be a confusing term any time of year, but especially in summer when some companies opt for a more relaxed dress code. A polo shirt may be acceptable in one environment but considered too casual in another. Learn the guidelines of your company, and then set your standard at the top. A good business casual yardstick is to consider what you might wear if you're invited to a summer event at a country club. Wearing proper summer office attire shows respect for yourself, for others in your workplace, and for your clients and customers.
- Ditch the flip-flops. No matter how casual your office setting is, leave casual sandals for the weekend. Instead of pumps, women may consider sling-backs or mules (slip-ons that don't have a back). Check your company's dress code before wearing open-toe shoes. And, if you bare your toes, make sure you have a perfect pedicure.
- Get noticed for the right things. Showing too much skin can hurt your credibility. Women can still be feminine but office-appropriate. Choose professional separates such as twin sets in summer-weight fabrics and colors, or a lightweight jacket or sweater over a sleeveless dress. You can remove the jacket or sweater when at your desk and easily throw it on if you have a meeting.
- Leave the Bermuda shorts and faded polos for the weekend. Men can stay crisp-looking in wrinkle-free 100 percent cotton dress shirts and chinos that are neatly pressed with a sharp crease. Keep a sports coat on a hanger on the back of your office door to put on for a client meeting or last-minute business lunch.

If you attend outdoor activities with your firm this summer — a barbecue, baseball game or company picnic — good manners send a powerful and positive message about your professional image. Consider these "do's and taboos":

- Do stop by and stay awhile. Companies provide picnics to give employees an informal time of relaxation and fun. It's often looked at as "team building" and a chance to meet people from other departments. Your absence may not ax your career, but your attendance shows loyalty to your supervisor and your organization. Be sure to find your boss and greet him or her soon after you arrive.
- Do think how your boss might dress, not your cubicle mates. Let common sense and decency be your guide. Smart choices for women include capris, Bermuda shorts, not-too-tight T-shirts or a sun dress that's not too revealing. Men can ensure a casual yet professional look with khaki trousers, Bermuda

shorts and polo shirts.

- Do mix and mingle. Don't just hang out with those from your area. Introduce yourself to those whom you may have only spoken to on the phone. Put a face to the name of the mail room supervisor or a manager from another floor.
- Don't let your guard down. Even at the company picnic, your professionalism is under scrutiny. Don't sabotage your credibility and career advancement with slipshod manners when downing your brisket and beans, or with too much imbibing, careless conversations and inappropriate remarks.
- Don't talk shop. Learn about each other instead. This is a time to meet other employees and their families. Spouses and guests will feel more included, too.
- Don't forget to show thanks. Before you leave, find the CEO and/or your boss, extend your hand and thank him or her for a great event. Better yet, follow up with a handwritten thank-you note. Your thoughtfulness will be noticed.

Rachel Wagner is a certified corporate etiquette and international protocol consultant and founder of the business etiquette firm, Rachel Wagner Etiquette and Protocol. She trains leadership teams on the topics of business and dining etiquette to polish their professional presence and the image of their company. Rachel is active with the American Society for Training and Development and the National Speaker's Association. She is author of a popular e-zine, The Savvy Professional, and is frequently quoted in the media. She can be reached by phone at 918.970.4400 or by email at Rachel@EtiquetteTrainer.com. Website: www.EtiquetteTrainer.com.