



PART FIVE

WORKING LIFE

MODULE 19

EMPLOYEE BEHAVIOUR IN THE WORKPLACE



JOB SEEKING SKILLS



MODULE 19

Employee behaviour in the workplace

Starting work for the first time is an exciting prospect but it is quite a different environment from school, college or university.

Employers will have certain expectations of how you should behave when at work, and this module outlines what you should be aware of to ensure that you behave appropriately in the workplace.

This will ensure that you make the best impression possible on your new employer and your transition to work goes smoothly.



ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE AND WORK BEHAVIOUR

Every place of work has a different atmosphere, a different environment and a different ethos. This is often referred to as workplace or organisational culture.

WORK BEHAVIOUR is the behaviour a person uses in the workplace and is **normally more formal than other types of human behaviour**. This can vary from business to business, and some can be far more casual than others. You should be aware that how you say something, your body language and facial expression is just as important as how you complete a task.

ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE refers to the **shared assumptions, values, and beliefs** which governs how people behave in organisations. These shared values guide how employees dress, act, and perform their jobs. Every organisation has its own culture, which provides guidelines and boundaries for the behaviour of their employees.

CODE
OF
CONDUCT

Most businesses have an **EMPLOYEE CODE OF CONDUCT** or **EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK** which explains their organisational culture and provides their workers with a guide to how they should behave within the workplace.



A code of conduct will outline what an employer expects from its employees.

The information will be based on guidelines and formal procedures that you'll be expected to follow.



When you start work you should find out if your new employer has a code of conduct and read it to understand what you can and cannot do within the workplace.

In the next section we'll explore the main things you will need to know as an employee and you'll see that in most cases it's about using your common sense and respecting people and the environment you work in.

HOW TO MAKE A GREAT START IN YOUR NEW JOB

THE FACTS:

First impressions last.

Making a good first impression with your new bosses and colleagues is very important, making a bad first impression can be hard to repair.

- **Disadvantage to overcome:** You're the new kid on the block, and you don't have a clue how to do anything. The others are all friendly with each other and know what they're doing.
- **Your advantage:** Because you're new, people make allowances. You will be introduced to everyone and expected to ask questions. So, now is the time to ask anything you want to know!

Here are a few points to help you create a great impression in the job.



JOB SEEKING SKILLS



HOW TO MAKE A GREAT IMPRESSION



Smile and the world smiles with you!

Look as if you're pleased to be there. If other people moan, don't join in.



Keep a notebook

If you're working for a big company find out everything about the company. Note down the names of the different departments and their managers. Note the names of the people you work beside, their job titles and what they do. Note any company rules.



Dress to impress

This all depends on the sort of job you're going to do and where you'll be working.

A new suit won't be much use to an apprentice plumber on a building site! A hard hat, boiler suit, work boots and (in winter) thermal underwear might be a better idea! (Your new employer might even supply you with most of these anyway).

Before you start, ask your employer if there's a 'dress code' (a policy on how staff are expected to dress). If working in an office or shop you will usually be expected to be smart. Even if the dress code is casual, go reasonably smart to start with until you see what other people are wearing. Avoid micro-skirts and extreme or unusual fashions.



Learn names

In the first few days you'll meet many new faces. If you can't remember names, write them in your notebook or use their name whenever you speak to the person.

This will help you to remember it and shows the other person that you're interested in them. When an unfamiliar name crops up in discussion, ask who it is.



Pay close attention when somebody shows you the ropes, take notes if you think it will help. Say thank you at the end of the session.



Remember that **how you treat people** is what matters most, not how you look.

What you say to people, and how you say it, has a big impact on what people think about you. Think about what makes you feel good when you meet someone. Do they listen, show that they are interested in what you have to say or look at you as if you don't matter?





Take the initiative

Volunteer to help with tasks. This makes you look keen and gives you an overall idea of the whole organisation. If you have finished your task, ask the boss if there's anything else you can do, or ask a workmate if you can be of help. Keep busy at all times.



Be honest

If you're unsure how to do something, ask. Don't muddle through and get it wrong.



Don't get into office or shop-floor politics

If your workmates are gossiping about other people in the company, stay out of it - for the first few weeks at least, until you get to know people and understand situations.



Don't do personal business on company time

This applies to emails, phone calls and social media.



Don't skive

During these early days, be punctual and work hard. Don't go over the time you have been given for your lunch break.



Don't be off sick unless it's absolutely necessary.



Don't smoke

You will be expected to go outside the building if you want to smoke during your break. Check where others go.



Keep track of projects you do and new skills you learn

Keep any material evidence, such as thank you letters from customers, certificates from courses or reports you've produced.

All this will be useful when your boss discusses your progress with you, or if you want to apply for promotion or another job, and need to update your CV.



WHAT IS INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR?



Inappropriate behaviour can range from being too chatty during working time or talking too loudly to more serious actions which don't comply with the code of conduct. This could be something that could cause offense, have a negative impact on an individual, or even be illegal.

These include:

- lack of cooperation with others in your team
- not following procedures
- swearing or offensive language
- poor time keeping
- frequent absence
- dishonesty, for example fraud or theft
- bullying and harassment.



The behaviours listed above could be considered “**unsatisfactory conduct**” or more seriously “**gross misconduct**” and the consequences can be severe, including disciplinary procedures by your employer or even prosecution if the behaviour is unlawful.

DO'S & DON'TS IN THE WORKPLACE

Even if your employer doesn't have a code of conduct there are general standards of behaviour that can applied in the workplace.

Below you'll find some useful tips of what you should and shouldn't do for some general categories in the workplace.

DO:

- Attend when expected
- Be punctual – start work and arrive at meetings on time
- Return from breaks on time
- Contact your line manager if you can't come in to work for any reason
- Leave the workplace at finishing time.

CATEGORY :

Attendance and punctuality

DON'T:

- Be late
- Miss a meeting without letting your colleagues know
- Stay off work without telling your manager why you can't come to work
- Leave work before agreed finishing time.

DO:

- Look clean and tidy
- Wear a uniform if required
- Use PPE if required.

CATEGORY :

Personal appearance

DON'T:

- Ignore the dress code
- Dress inappropriately for role
- Not use PPE provided by your employer.

DO:

- Keep your work area clean and tidy
- Keep noise to an acceptable level for the environment you work in
- Use storage provided to store belongings
- Ensure paperwork and files are cleared from your desk overnight
- Clean up after using shared facilities, for example kitchen equipment, breakout areas.

CATEGORY :

Working environment

DON'T:

- Have an untidy workspace
- Keep a large amount of personal items in the workplace
- Display material which could be offensive
- Leave a mess after using shared facilities
- Listen to loud music within an office environment.

DO:

- Be courteous and polite to others
- Treat colleagues with dignity and respect
- Communicate appropriately
- Be supportive of your colleagues
- Have a positive attitude to colleagues and tasks.

CATEGORY :

Language and behaviour

DON'T:

- Shout or talk loudly in the workplace
- Swear and use offensive language
- Take part in gossip or "bad mouth" colleagues
- Engage in excessive chatter during working hours
- Exclude others
- Complain about work you've been asked to do.

DO:

- Adhere to your company's ICT policy
- Use company equipment for business purpose only.

CATEGORY :

Use of equipment
(including ICT and equipment)

DON'T:

- Use equipment for personal reasons
- Send personal emails from work email account
- Use company internet to purchase goods for personal use
- Access personal social media accounts on company equipment.

DO:

- Keep your mobile phone away from your workspace during working hours
- Only make personal calls, message friends or use social media during breaks.

CATEGORY :

Use of personal mobile phones/social media

DON'T:

- Answer personal calls/texts during working hours
- Read or post on social media during working hours
- Keep your mobile phone visible at your workstation during working hours.

DO:

- Act honestly.

CATEGORY :

Honesty and integrity

DON'T:

- Steal from your employer
- Engage in activity which could be against company rules or illegal.

DO:

- Keep passwords confidential
- Secure or lock away confidential information at the end of your shift
- Shred or securely dispose of confidential information when it is no longer needed.

CATEGORY :

Confidentiality and information security

DON'T:

- Share your login details and passwords with other employees
- Leave information containing anyone's personal details in a public area
- Disclose confidential information to anyone outside of your workplace.

DO:

- Complete tasks as instructed by your manager
- Complete tasks within deadlines
- Ensure you follow procedures.

CATEGORY :

Following instructions/procedures

DON'T:

- Ignore instructions from your manager
- Cut corners and not follow company procedures
- Ignore deadlines.

ING SKILLS

Age



The Equality Act 2010

Race

Protected characteristics ensure that everyone is treated equally regardless of race, religion, gender, ability or sexual orientation.

Disability

Religion or belief

The Equalities Act 2010 makes it clear that:

- harassment should always be considered by the impact it has on someone
- conduct which is intended to be friendly could also amount to harassment if the recipient considers it offensive
- the recipient of the behaviour decides whether it is unwanted
- unwanted conduct does not need to be directed at a person. It can be witnessed or overheard
- it doesn't matter whether other people find the conduct acceptable, or it is common in the workplace.

Gender

Sexual orientation

Gender reassignment

BULLYING AND HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

Everyone has the right to be treated with dignity and respect at work.

Bullying and harassment is not acceptable behaviour in the workplace, and employers are responsible for preventing behaviour which could be classed as such.

Employees are protected by a combination of employers' policies and legislation.

Bullying and harassment is behaviour that makes someone feel intimidated or offended.

Bullying or harassing behaviour could include:

- spreading malicious (nasty) rumours
- unfair treatment
- picking on or regularly undermining someone
- denying someone training or promotion opportunities
- cyberbullying
- exclusion of a person
- threats, shouting and abusive comments.

Bullying and harassment can happen:

- face-to-face
- by letter
- by email
- by phone
- via social media.

DEFINITION OF BULLYING AND HARASSMENT



HARASSMENT: **Unwanted conduct** related to a relevant **protected characteristic**, which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual.

Unwanted conduct can happen through any kind of behaviour including spoken or written words, physical gestures, jokes or pranks.

Protected characteristics are:

- age
- disability
- gender
- gender reassignment
- race
- religion or belief
- sexual orientation
- pregnancy and maternity.

SOME EXAMPLES OF HARASSMENT

AGE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Considering someone too young or old for promotion• Age related remarks or jokes• Being excluded from activities due to age
DISABILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Derogatory (insulting or offensive) remarks, mocking, mimicking, staring• Making assumptions about someone's ability because of their disability• Unreasonably highlighting someone's disability
GENDER	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sexual comments, jokes or gestures• Posting sexual comments on social media• Unwanted or derogatory comments about a person's appearance
GENDER REASSIGNMENT/ TRANS IDENTITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transphobic comments, jokes and name calling• Verbal or physical abuse• Refusing to treat a person as their new gender when they transition
RACE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Isolating someone because of their race, colour or ethnic origin• Remarking on a person's skin colour or other cultural traits• Discussing harmful racial stereotypes
RELIGION	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mocking people because of their religious beliefs• Pressurising others to participate in religious/political groups• Making unwanted comments on dress
SEXUAL ORIENTATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Making homophobic insults or threats• Asking a lesbian, gay or bisexual colleague intrusive personal questions• Outing a person as lesbian, gay or bisexual without their permission



BULLYING: Offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means that undermine, humiliate, belittle or injure the recipient.

The impact on the individual can be the same as harassment and the words bullying and harassment are often used interchangeably in the workplace.



THE LAW

Bullying itself is not against the law, but harassment is.

All employers have a legal obligation under the **Equality Act 2010** to ensure that harassment does not take place at work.

The Act makes it clear that:

- harassment should always be considered by the impact it has on someone
- conduct which is intended to be friendly could also amount to harassment if the recipient considers it offensive
- the recipient of the behaviour decides whether it is unwanted
- unwanted conduct does not need to be directed at a person. It can be witnessed or overheard
- it doesn't matter whether other people find the conduct acceptable or it is common in the workplace.

THE IMPACT OF BULLYING & HARASSMENT

Bullying and harassment has a negative impact on the person receiving this treatment from others, this can include:

- feeling anxious and humiliated
- feelings of anger and frustration at being unable to cope
- retaliation of some kind
- feeling afraid
- demotivation
- stress
- loss of self-confidence and self-esteem.



Any of these factors caused by harassment or bullying can lead to job insecurity, illness, absence from work, and even resignation.

Job performance is almost always affected and relations in the workplace suffer.

WHAT EMPLOYEES SHOULD DO IF THEY'RE BULLIED OR HARASSED

Employees should see if they can sort out the problem informally first.

If they cannot, they should talk to their:

- manager
- human resources (HR) department
- trade union representative.



If this does not work, they can make a formal complaint using their employer's grievance procedure. If the harassment continues, they can take legal action at an employment tribunal.



This is a lot of information to take in and it probably all sounds very serious.

Of course, this is a serious topic, but it is important to understand workplace behaviour and what is expected of you – this will make your move into working life smoother!

Remember that employers will provide information and support whenever you need it.



To help reinforce the topics, complete activity 2.



Activity 1: Behaviour quiz

Complete the [Activity 1](#) quiz on various case scenarios on workplace behaviour.



Activity 2: Appropriate or inappropriate?

Complete the [Activity 2](#) table to decide which behaviour is appropriate or inappropriate at work.

You can also explore more information on the topics covered in your own time.

Here are two links to start with:



[Acas - Advice](#)

[GOV.UK – Bullying and harassment](#)

Now you have learned about employee behaviour in the workplace,
you can move on to

[Module 20 - Health and safety in the workplace](#)

Or [click here](#) to return to the main screen.