

Minding Your Business Card Manners

Business card etiquette is somewhat like dinner etiquette. When keeping your elbows off the table, the reward you hope for is an invitation back for another dinner. However, when minding your business card manners a potential part of your income is at stake.

Here are a few simple rules to keep in mind:

Your business cards should be clean and up-to-date

It is not worth saving a few cents to hand out wrinkled, stained, or torn cards. Likewise if any of your information has changed: "Business cards with words scratched out gives the impression of disorganization."

Do not force your card on those who have not asked for it

You should wait for the opportunity to come up naturally, such as when someone specifically asks for it or you are engaged in a conversation about business. Do not mistake the salutary or polite question about what you do as a good opportunity; the card will probably be thrown away if the recipient lacks genuine interest when receiving it.

Treat cards with respect when receiving them

"Act as though you have received a gift." Upon accepting a card, you have the opportunity to repeat the name and be corrected on pronunciation--to be corrected on pronunciation after this is a bit more of a gaff. You should also ask any questions that the card itself may bring to mind and comment on the design if practical. The idea is to show interest in any contact's card, which will make them more likely to be interested in yours.

Do not enclose business cards in personal or emotional correspondence

Condolences, get well soon, and even congratulations should be handwritten with no business card accompanying it. These types of correspondences need to show care and time spent by handwriting, and a business card along with it almost seems to say "enough about you, now about me."

Wait until someone of higher rank asks for your card or a third party has introduced you

The CEO will appreciate the respect you show for his/her time by waiting for the proper opportunity to present your card.

In Australia, it is perfectly okay to leave a card out once you have received it, so why not have it where you can see it for the entire conversation? You are less likely to stumble on names and titles. When the conversation is breaking, you want to let them know you intend to keep the card (only discard cards discreetly). Signal this by tucking it securely away in a day-planner, portfolio or business card case.

Elements of this article in quotes were referenced from:

"Simple Rules for Good Business Card Etiquette." Aleigh Acerni. Charleston Regional Business Journal. February 24, 2003. (http://www.charlestonbusiness.com/issues/6_4/news/2793-1.html)