

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



196 Those Unwritten Workplace Rules

Every organization has rules, and they come in two flavors...those that are written down and in the employee handbook, and others which are usually not written. We're responsible for keeping all of them, whether they're in writing or not. I'm Jerry Roberts and today we talk about the reality of the unwritten variety, on The Extra Point.

Every workplace has unwritten rules and they can differ from place to place. If you're starting a new job you're going to need to learn what they are if you want to get along with your coworkers, and have the best chance for success at the new employer.

If you're a generally courteous person and think about how your actions may impact the people around you, you'll probably do well pretty much anywhere you go. Here's a few things not to do. 1) Don't play loud music. If it's okay to use earphones and headphones where you work, and you don't mind risking your hearing — use them. 2) Don't bring smelly food and certainly don't cook it there. 3) Don't leave a mess in the kitchen. This could be dishes in the sink or something that you do cook and it splatters in the microwave...which, of course, becomes a gift for people using it after you. 4) Don't...don't...don't...I repeat don't...steal food from the employee refrigerator. 5) Don't pass along jokes or memes, or Facebook posts.

Those are pretty basic. There likely are many more and nobody is going to make a list for you, because that would then make them, er, written rules. Get it? you're going to have to be observant and see what and how people do things.

Unwritten rules are brought in by workers who experienced them in past jobs. Some rules even precede the oldest old-timers on the payroll. I've heard such people say things like, "I don't know when that started, they were

doing it when I got here." Unwritten rules are passed from generation to generation, long after the people who initiated them have moved on.

Can you create a new unwritten rule? Sure. I know of one guy who started at a small company and on his first day one of the workers was celebrating a birthday. There was a cake and when it was time to sing "Happy Birthday" he pulled out his harmonica and led a rousing version of the song. Everybody loved it. So much so, that for over 10 years, it's been the unwritten rule that all birthdays include him and his harmonica.

Unwritten rules may include when it's okay to ignore the chain-of-command, and just how "open" those open-door policies really are. You may learn it's not always the department that needs resources most that gets them, but the one that screams the loudest. Further, there may be certain relationships you'll need to build if you want what you need when you need it. Is that fair? No. But it could be reality.

You also might discover that the unwritten rules may be different from department to department in the same organization.

Let me leave you with this. There are always unwritten rules, regardless of where you work. Some are good, some are lame, and some can actually be a roadblock to your success if you ignore them. The key is to keep your eyes and ears open, and understand what's going on.

That's The Extra Point. Get out there and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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