

How to Be a Good Co-Worker



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When young attorneys start out practicing the law, they often focus on learning how to be a good attorney. They want to know how to write a good brief or present a perfect oral argument. Too often, however, young attorneys forget to focus on learning how to be a good co-worker.

As an attorney, you will spend the majority of your time with your co-workers. If you work in a hostile way, your work life can be miserable. If you are a good co-worker, your work life will be easier, and your career will be better for it. But what does it take to be a good co-worker? This article will discuss how doing your job, being polite, not talking about other people, ignoring other people's aggression and letting go of hate are necessary to be a good co-worker.

Do Your Job

The best way to be a good co-worker is to do your job. If you can consistently meet the requirements of your job, the people around you are not forced to pick up your work. The office works efficiently, and everyone is happier.

Be Polite

Rudeness will never make you look good. Be polite to everyone you work with, whether you like them or not. There are no exceptions to this rule. I suspect that you are specifically thinking of one or two co-workers that you dread talking to and emailing. I am firmly in favor of avoiding people like that in an office. But when you must interact with them, you should be polite (and brief).

I am not suggesting that you should be a pushover. You can and should say no but be polite when you say no or set an appropriate boundary at work.



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Stop Talking About Other People

You should assume that anything you say in an office will be repeated or overheard. Act accordingly. If you are frustrated with someone and need to vent, do that outside of the office. Talking about a negative office interaction or a loathsome co-worker will only cause more trouble.

Every second you spend complaining to your boss about another person is a second you are not talking about how great your work is. It is another second not building professional relationships with the people around you. Every second spent talking about someone else is a waste. Use your time to build your career, not tear other people down.

Ignore Other People's Aggression

Attorneys will be aggressive toward you. People in an office will send you nasty emails or say things behind your back (or to your face). When confronted with these situations, be the bigger person. Ignore it.

Starting World War III in your office is not going to make anyone like you. If you can be the person to de-escalate a situation by refusing to respond to a nasty email or remaining calm when someone attempts to start a fight with you, your office will be better for it. Many attorneys are looking for a reaction when they attack you. If you take away the satisfaction of watching you explode, you will be surprised at how quickly the attacks stop.

Let Go of the Hate

Hating someone only perpetuates and prolongs a conflict. Hate also makes the office awkward. The sooner you can let your hate go, the sooner the conflict will end. Hate places an inappropriate amount of importance on one person. Your career will not be defined by one person. One bad co-worker or one bad boss will not destroy you. Taking the time to hate and stew about specific people who have wronged you takes away valuable time and energy you could spend building your career.

I strongly encourage you to let go of hate mostly for your own benefit. Hate is a waste of time and energy. If you have experienced a difficult situation with another person, forgive them. Choosing to forgive someone does not validate or excuse that person's behavior. It allows you to move on.

I am not naïve about the practice of law, and I understand that some attorneys are overbearing and impossible to be around. If you are in that situation, find another job. If you find that you are haunted by the way you have been treated in your past, do not be afraid to seek professional help. If you heal your own pain, you can keep it from spreading to the people around you. You can also live a more quiet and peaceful life.

While you are busy learning how to be an attorney, do not forget to learn how to be a good co-worker. YLD

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