

# from 9 to 5

## TODAY'S ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONAL

### INSIDE

#### How Well Do You Handle Employee Concerns?

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### QUICK TIPS

## Learn Time-Management Skills In A Heartbeat

Tackling piles of work when you have a mere eight hours in the day is never easy. But if you utilize great time-management skills, you can become more efficient during your workday.

Take these four tips from **mindtools.com** to begin managing your time more effectively:

🐾 **Remember the 80:20 rule.** This rule states that 80 percent of unfocused effort generates only 20 percent of results.

When you take into account time management, you can make sure that you concentrate that effort on tasks most beneficial to you.

🐾 **Create an activity log.** You'll be surprised at how much time you spend doing low-value tasks such as checking junk email. If you write down the activities that you engage in and the time you spend doing those tasks, you will find that you are wasting a lot of time.

Try creating a log for the week and see how much time you can find that would otherwise go to waste. Change your schedule around so that you can use that time more efficiently.

🐾 **Maintain a prioritized to-do list.** Many people create a to-do list, but the deadlines are so all over the place that it seems overwhelming.

Create a to-do list with the closest deadlines toward the top of the list. Identify what you need to do and when. Now, work on the things that matter at the time, and slowly work your way down to the rest.

🐾 **Set personal goals.** Take learning time-management skills one day at a time. Make it a personal goal to save as much time in your day as possible.

Try saving a half hour of wasted time one week, and then an hour the next. You'll see how efficient you'll become in the future. ■

- **Beat Hackers.** If possible, try to change your computer password every few months to avoid hackers.
- **Carry extras.** Women should carry extra hosiery, while men should carry extra dress socks in their car in case you step in a puddle, mud or snow. It's best to carry extras instead of walking around all day with wet feet.
- **Clear it out.** If you're using a computer with Microsoft Windows and Internet Explorer, make sure you clean out your cookies occasionally. Although we love the edible ones, the ones stored on your computer as tracking files will slow your PC down tremendously. Right click on your Internet Explorer icon on your desktop, go to "properties," and click "delete cookies."

## Get To Know Your Co-Workers With 'Employee Appreciation Day'

A fun activity around the office might be to choose a day to appreciate each employee in your office. Designate a day for everyone, and use it to thank them for their hard work.

You can go all out with thank you cards and flowers, or you can simply write them a personal note to hang on their wall. Everyone will eagerly await their own personal appreciation day! See how your company morale will skyrocket after you've mastered this activity. ■

### WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

You're new on the job and want to increase your likeability around the office.

(See page 2)

## WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

# 5 Tips To Better Likeability In The Workplace

Being the company favorite isn't easy, and building your co-workers' trust and respect can be a pretty daunting task. Fortunately, you can dazzle your fellow colleagues with these helpful tips to increase your likeability around the office.

Try these five tips from **Justin Hartfield's** *Five Tips To Increase Your Likeability*:

**1. Be positive.** The first step to being a likeable person is to possess a likeable attitude. People will generally flock to those who are upbeat and positive. Try to stay positive even during a negative moment. Rid yourself of any pet peeves that may influence how others feel about you. Try to see the good in every outcome so that people will want to stick around you.

**2. Control your insecurities.** Most people think that others view them in a negative way, when in actuality this isn't true. This can have a detrimental effect, because no one will want to be around someone who is constantly sending negative vibes. Try to present a cheery attitude, and block out any insecurities you may have about yourself that could cause others not to like you.

**3. Provide value.** If you want others to like you, you must start by valuing yourself. If you don't see yourself as a valuable, giving person, then no one else will either.

Pamper yourself when needed. Enjoy the talents and skills you bring to others. Bask in your good personality traits instead of worrying about whether they will impress your co-workers.

**4. Eliminate judgment.** Don't adhere to stereotypes. Treat everyone the same as you'd want them to treat you, and you will receive positivity in return. Never allow your judgments of others to get in the way of meeting new people.

**5. Set boundaries.** Earn respect by setting healthy limits. You can lose likeability by allowing yourself to be taken advantage of and disrespected around the workplace. Set limits as to what you will tolerate and stick to it. People will like you just because you desire respect from your fellow workers.

Remember not to be forceful when putting yourself in a positive light. You don't want to come off as being better than everyone, but simply as being a friendly person. Try these tips to build your likeability around the office one step at a time. ■

## I Want To Hear From You!


Every issue of *From 9 to 5* includes a mix of topics I believe will be of interest to you. But, coming up with this mix is no easy task! To help me ensure this newsletter is filled with articles you care about, please write to me at [nicoler@elijournals.com](mailto:nicoler@elijournals.com). I'd love to hear from you! ■

## INSIGHT

*"You can tell more about a person by what he says about others than you can by what others say about him."*

~Leo Aikman

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## Ward Off Poor Letter Writing Skills With These Helpful Hints

Writing that snazzy business letter and getting your main point across is not always easy. Fortunately, there are great tips out there to help you get that letter out in time.



Try these tips from writing coach **Shaun Fawcett's** *Writing Help Central*:

☞ **Keep your letter short and simple.** Get to the point as quick as you can. People don't like to read past one page, so keep all your letters to one page if possible. "If you can't make your point in one page or less, then you aren't ready to write the letter," says Fawcett. Try to keep your letter to a 350- to 400-word maximum.

☞ **Focus on the receiver's needs.** Address all the needs of the person to whom you are writing the letter. Imagine that he is sitting across from you ready to receive the information. Visualizing this concept helps to make sure that you address all the reader's major concerns.

☞ **Use simple language.** Don't get too technical or use jargon in your business letters. Refrain from using acronyms unless you properly explain them. Many times you are the only person that will understand them. Make sure the letter is easy for the recipient to read and understand without having to call you for further clarification.

☞ **Revise the letter.** Step away from the letter for a few minutes and then read it over. Coming back to a letter with a clear head allows you to fully comprehend what you've written. If you catch something that doesn't make sense to you, reword it. Ask someone else to edit the letter for you in case you've missed something.

☞ **Spell check your letter.** At the very end, run a spell check to make sure you have caught all spelling and grammatical errors. Never send a letter without making sure that you've corrected all your errors, because the letter will look unprofessional and sloppy to the receiver.

It is important to give yourself enough time to draft out a letter and read it over. Rushing through a letter to meet the mailing deadline produces massive mistakes and typos. This reflects on not only your skills, but also your company's reputation. If you're not sure of something, make sure you get clarification on it before you send it through the mail. ■

## How Well Do You Handle Employee Concerns?

Managing company concerns is just as important as your customers' concerns. And as an administrative assistant, you may have the responsibility of listening to and responding to your co-workers' concerns and problems.

If your co-workers are happy, things around the office will seem to go that much smoother. Everyone will work harder because they know that others care and value their opinions. Answer true or false to the statements below to see if you are handling employee concerns in a satisfactory manner.

	True	False
1. I give my co-workers my full attention when they are voicing their concerns.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I respond with statements like, "That's awful" or, "We need to do something about that!"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I let my co-workers voice their concerns without interrupting.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I remain neutral about issues involving other people.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I try to resolve the issue or explain clearly why I can't resolve it.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Let's see how you stack up. Here are the best answers:

**1. True.** You should give your co-workers your full attention when they come to you with a concern. This shows that you truly value their input and that you are eager to solve their dilemma.

**2. False.** You don't want to say things that will seem as if you agree with your co-workers or support their side of the situation, according to **Marie G. McIntyre, Ph.D.**, author of *Responding to Employee Concerns*. Taking sides can be dangerous when solving problems.

**3. True.** Never interrupt the employee while he is telling you his side of the story. Remain quiet and attentive to get all the needed information to move forward with a solution.

**4. True.** Remaining neutral is the best way to solve an issue successfully. You never want to take sides or show favoritism. Try to be fair and solve the problem based on the evidence at hand.

**5. True.** If you can resolve the issue, then do so. But if the situation is out of your control, you need to explain why. You can also direct your co-workers to your boss, who can step in to solve the problem. ■

# Learn The Secret To A Professional Wardrobe

Having trouble figuring out what to wear around the office? The secret behind professional attire is simple for both men and women. All it takes is knowing the traditional dress styles and applying them to your wardrobe.

Take a look at these lists for basic business attire from **Brody Communications, Ltd.**'s **Marjorie Brody**, author of *Professional Impressions: Etiquette for Everyone, Everyday*.

## Women:

- \* Black or gray suit
- \* Navy or dark burgundy suit
- \* Two-piece dress
- \* White blouses
- \* Scarves that match colors from your suit
- \* Neutral or taupe hosiery
- \* One pair gold and one pair silver earrings
- \* Black, brown or burgundy briefcase
- \* Black leather handbag
- \* Black, navy or taupe pumps

## Men:

- \* Solid-color navy or gray suits
- \* Black or navy socks (NEVER wear white socks)
- \* Burgundy, navy or mauve silk ties
- \* Blue or pinstriped shirt
- \* Navy sports coat
- \* Charcoal gray suit
- \* White cotton shirts
- \* Black leather belt
- \* Leather briefcase
- \* Black slip-on shoes

When dressing in your best business attire, remember to avoid flashy colors and wear pastels with caution. Try to resort to neutral colors like black, brown and beige.

Also remember to buy clothes that not only look good, but feel good as well. Make sure dresses and pants are not too tight or snug when you attempt to sit. Make sure your suit jackets are long enough to cover your pants and that the material doesn't bulge when you walk. ■

# 3 Great Dressing Tips For Casual Fridays

Now that you're aware of how to dress on a typical workday, it's even better to know how to dress on your company's casual Fridays.

If your company has casual Fridays, you may think this is a reason to go laid-back, but the secret lies in your ability to come off as professional without a business suit.

Take these tips on keeping it casual while maintaining your professionalism:

**1. Make sure your jeans are professional.** Yes, you can wear jeans on casual Friday, but make sure your jeans are presentable. Remember you are still at work, so no cutoff jeans, tight jeans that hug your skin, or ripped material.

If you want to get different color jeans than your traditional blue style, try to refrain from bright, loud colors. It's also a good idea not to wear jean shorts.

**2. Make sure your clothes fit you well.** Don't wear baggy tops or shirts that barely cover your waist. You want to be comfortable enough so that you're not constantly pulling at your clothes all day.

You also want to make sure your shirts are an appropriate size for your frame. For women who chose to wear a skirt, make sure it's a decent length. Four fingers from the knee is the general rule.

**3. Make sure your shirts are appropriate.** It's nice to wear shirts with funny sayings on them, but it's best to leave them in your closet when you're going to work.

Wearing shirts with a small appropriate logo on them is okay, but nothing glaring. You can also wear shirts with a school name written across them, or better yet, your own company's logo.

The key to casual Fridays is to still maintain a professional look.

Try to remember that although the day gives you some leeway, you're still at work. Take these tips into account for your next dress-down Friday. ■

# Helpful Hints For Going Back To School

Jumpstarting your career may mean a trip back to the classroom. If you're been out of the academic environment for quite some time, it's perfectly normal to have some jitters about returning to school. Balancing between classes and work can also be a difficult task that you will have to master as a returning student.

Here are some things to consider when deciding whether to go back for your degree:

✎ **Assess your income.** Many people decide to return for a degree after they have reviewed their income status. If your income isn't as high as you would like it to be, or you have a hard time budgeting for your and your family's needs, then you might want to decide to advance your career by obtaining a degree.

According to the **U.S. Census Bureau**, the median annual income for an employee with a high school degree was \$27,915. For an employee with a bachelor's degree, it was \$51,206, and for a masters degree or higher, it was \$74,602 or more. Assess where you are in terms of those income brackets, and determine if getting a higher degree may help you advance financially as well as professionally.

✎ **Assess your financial need.** Determine how much money it will cost you to return to a school of your choosing. If you're going part-time, you may still be able to qualify for some financial aid.

Check into what your school would offer you as a part-time student, and see what other outside scholarships and grants for which you may be eligible. You should also ask your boss what the company policy is on tuition reimbursement.

✎ **Assess your schedule.** You will want to look at what adjustments you may have to make to your schedule to go back to school. If you have kids, you will want to make sure you have a babysitter on hand who will be able to watch them when you are in class or studying. You'll want to discuss these possibilities with your family and not make this crucial decision alone. You will also want to plan out how many courses you feel that you can handle during a given semester, and go over your options with your school advisor.

✎ **Assess your career goals.** Before you decide to take that giant leap into the classroom, you want to make sure you're set on your career goals. Know what field you're getting into and what it takes to obtain a degree within that major. Know what skills you want to take away from it as well. You may also think about positions you want to advance to once you complete your studies.

Take the time to consider why you want to go back to school and the long-term benefits of doing so. You want to be certain of your personal and professional career goals before you sign up for that first semester. Going back to school takes a lot of time, patience, energy and money. So make sure you know exactly what you're getting into before you confirm your decision to become a returning student. ■

## Do You Value Your Co-Workers?

To gain appreciation at the workplace, you must learn to give of it as well. Many of us don't take the time to show how much we value each other on the job, but doing so can improve company morale and employee relations. Answer true or false to the statements below to see if you're valuing your co-workers the way you should.

- |  | <u>TRUE</u>              | <u>FALSE</u>             |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. I applaud my colleague on a job well done.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I purchase small gifts for my co-workers when they have gone out their way for me.            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I send my colleagues thank-you cards or e-mails when they have completed a major task for me. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I always try to administer praise as opposed to criticism.                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I always ask how my colleague's day is going.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. I try not to be concerned over my co-workers' personal matters.                               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. I am the first to help out when someone is in need of my assistance.                          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

*Turn to page 6 to see the best answers...*

Continued from quiz on page 5...

**Are you valuing your co-workers enough? Here are the best answers:**

**1. True.** The key to valuing the other workers in your workplace is to show that you appreciate what they do for the company. You always want to applaud them on a good job even if it has nothing to do with a job they are doing for you.

**2. True.** Showing your appreciation should come occasionally in the form of a small token gift. It doesn't have to be anything major, but you should show that you care about what they have done for you. If a co-worker goes out of his way to help jumpstart your vehicle one cold evening, then you should think of ways to repay him.

**3. True.** Sending an e-mail or note showing your appreciation for a co-worker's completion of a task can show that you value his input. Try to show your co-workers that you appreciate a job well done by administering your thanks.

**4. True.** Criticism will not show that you value your colleagues, so try to refrain from administering it as much as possible. Make positive remarks towards them instead.

**5. True.** You can show that you care by asking your co-worker how his day is going and being truly concerned about his response. Try to ask this of at least a few of the workers in your office, especially those who aren't given that much attention during the typical workday.

**6. False.** You should show genuine concern regarding your co-workers' personal issues as much as you can. It shows that you value their wellbeing if you are thinking of their situation.

**7. True.** Just as you would want someone to come to your rescue, you should be willing to come to the rescue of your office partners as well. Try to show yourself as friendly and helpful whenever possible to encourage appreciation around the workplace. ■

## Learn Great Coffee Substitutes

If you're an avid coffee drinker, you probably can't survive those first few hours without your handy cup of Joe. But if you've found that you, your co-workers or your clients who come into your office can't drink coffee due to a medical condition, you are in luck. There are many coffee substitutes you can use and even create to get that extra jolt.

Below are some alternative coffee recipes from **Make-stuff.com**. Try them out the next time you or someone in your office wants a coffee buzz without the coffee.

▶ **Chicory coffee:** These white fleshy roots that you roast until dark brown and brittle, then grind, make an excellent coffee. Prepare like coffee. Use one to one and a half teaspoons per cup of water. Store the chicory grounds in an airtight container to use all year round.

▶ **Parsnip coffee:** Finely chop (or grate) a batch of fresh parsnip roots (skins and all) to the consistency of hash brown potatoes. Dehydrate the bits, then roast them at 400 degrees for approximately 20 minutes or until they're a very dark brown. Turn the oven off and allow to cool in the oven. Then steep the parsnip bits in scalding hot water — one rounded tablespoon per cup.

▶ **Wheat coffee:** Grind six cups of wheat in a coffee grinder (if you don't have a grinder, buy the wheat already cracked). Combine with one cup of milk, one-half cup of molasses, and one-half teaspoon of salt.

Mix well to a paste consistency, then spread on cookie sheets. Bake at 350 degrees until brown (watch carefully so they don't burn). When brown, reduce oven heat to low and allow to dry until mixture is crisp. When cool, break the mixture into pieces and grind in coffee grinder or food processor (or just crush with a rolling pin). Store in a dry, airtight container. Prepare coffee as you would with regular coffee.

▶ **Garbanzo beans (chickpea) coffee:** Roast chickpeas at 300 degrees until dark brown — the color of roasted coffee beans. Then grind the beans in a coffee grinder to the same consistency you desire in regular coffee grounds.

▶ **Barley coffee:** Spread barley, husks and all, onto a cookie sheet and roast at 425 degrees, stirring and turning occasionally, until completely dark brown. Grind and use one teaspoon per cup of water.

You may want to visit the [make-stuff.com](http://make-stuff.com) website to find out where you can find additional recipes and ingredients for the ones we've mentioned. Some ingredients such as those needed to make chicory coffee may be hard to find at your local supermarket. You can also try browsing your local health food store to look for herbal coffee as well. Before you prepare your favorite drink, check with your doctor to make sure you can add these coffee substitutes to your diet. ■

# Power Up On Microsoft PowerPoint For A Stellar Presentation

When giving that awesome presentation, don't ruin it with bad PowerPoint slides. Make great presentations with these key tips from the **American Speech-Language-Hearing Association** in the article "PowerPoint Do's and Don'ts."

## Do:

1. **Use legitimate size font** — your titles should be no more than 36 pt, while bulleted points should be no more than 24 pt.
2. **Cut your words down** — be brief and use keywords. Cut sentences down to phrases.
3. **Make every word and image count** — don't use images and words you don't need, but only those that are relevant to your presentation.
4. **Limit the number of slides** — use the rule of thumb of one slide per minute.

## Don't:

1. **Crowd your slides** — space out your information so that your slides aren't cluttered.
2. **Overuse special effects** — some animation can be quite annoying and unprofessional, so avoid using them. If you have to add some kind of effects, limit yourself so that it doesn't appear overwhelming.
3. **Use more than eight words per line** — this is a good rule of thumb so as not to crowd your slides with too many words.
4. **Use hard-to-read color slides** — the worst thing you can do is create slides that are difficult to read for your audience. Avoid color contrasts like green font on a pink background, or yellow type font. ■

# Beat Procrastination In 5 Easy Steps

We'd all like to put off that dreadful task for just one more hour, but putting important things off until the last minute can prove detrimental in the long run. Starting and ending tasks on time is the only way to avoid unnecessary stress and headache.

Motivational speaker **Steve Pavlina** offers these five tips for eliminating procrastination:

**1. Replace "have to" with "want to."** If you use the term "have to" when referring to a task, you will instantly feel as if you are being forced to do it. As a natural human reaction, rebellion or resentment kicks in when thinking of the task at hand.

Your resentment is what allows you to put off doing the task.

Change your thinking to "I want to do this task," which puts you in control. "Realize that you don't have to do anything you don't want to do. Even though there are serious consequences, you are free to choose," states Pavlina.

**2. Replace "finish it" with "begin it."** Focusing too much on finishing a task that seems impossible overwhelms even the most ambitious person. Try to think of your project's beginning stages and work from there. Break it down if you have to, and focus on finishing it one step at a time.

**3. Get rid of your perfectionist idea.** No one is perfect, and you can't do everything. Think of all the things that you can accomplish and put your energy there. Similarly, don't let the fact that you could make a mistake stop you from starting your task.

**4. Reward yourself with fun.** Give yourself a break when you've finished your task. Enjoy some music or go for a walk. Take time out to reward yourself for a job well done.

**5. Give yourself a time limit.** Break down your task into time blocks and then stick to them. For example, give yourself 30 minutes to complete an assignment and focus on that assignment for that time block. ■

# Don't Let Criticism Get You Down With 3 Easy Steps

We've all had times when criticism has lowered our self-esteem. Learning how to take criticism well can mean a big difference in your professional career. Not all of us are cut out to maintain our self-esteem when criticism comes our way, but with these three tips you'll be able to handle criticism in no time:

**1. Ask for specifics** — Don't be boggled down simply because you don't have all the needed answers. If someone is criticizing you, ask for the facts before you jump to conclusions.

"Continue to ask for details until you understand what the other person is saying," states **Annette Richmond** in her article *How to make criticism constructive not destructive*. You can try to ask questions like, "What part of the report didn't you like?" or, "What didn't you like about the way I handled the account?"

**2. Own your mistakes** — If you have truly done something wrong, it's best to own up to your mistakes so that you can begin to learn from them. Never take one mistake and dwell on it to the point where you feel like you're making mistakes all the time. Chances are you're not doing something wrong all the time, but it is just one slip up.

No one is perfect, so don't beat yourself up over it. Learning from your mistakes will help you avoid those situations and can cut down on the criticism that you receive overall.

**3. Recognize the positives** — Likewise, try to focus on the positives for every negative criticism that you receive. Focus on the praises that you hear and not just the one criticism that you encountered. This will allow you to keep your self-esteem intact and enable you to handle future criticism.

You should always be aware of when others criticize constructively or destructively by noting what they're trying to get across to you, and how. If they are criticizing you in an unprofessional manner, then chances are the criticism is not to your benefit and you should speak up on it. ■

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When: May 23, 2007 at 1:00pm ET

Speaker: Lynn Outwater

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