

GMU's School of Policy, Government, and International Affairs is providing you with the intellectual tools and skills to become policy analysts. However, for most of you, who will enter employment at mid-level positions in federal, state or local governments or NGOs, it is very unlikely that you will create policy solutions the day you start work. That day will come. But in the meantime there are work-related issues that are likely to arise. This document is intended to guide your work habits and attitudes. Do not take these suggestions more seriously than they warrant. They should not be viewed as iron laws, but rather as considerations for you to think about.

#### A. Work Habits

1. You will inevitably have a "boss." Some bosses are jerks; some are great men and women. The best way you can impress is by making your boss's work day easier; to be useful to him or her; to take care of problems. Making problems, even trivial ones, disappear is one of the greatest skills known to mankind. Doing so without leaving footprints is even more sublime.

2. Act professionally. Professional jobs are not like jobs at McDonald's, or The Palm, or the country club. Show up on time, even early, and don't watch the clock so you can leave "on time." Work until the job is done. Overtime pay, if you are entitled to it, will take care of itself. Have the attitude that the work comes first. Your boss will notice and approve.

3. Resist the urge – often driven by nerves and anxiety – to reveal too much about yourself in order to establish rapport with your coworkers. Even innocent exchanges about your personal life can have unintended consequences. Your early office BFF may turn out to be a complete jerk to whom you earlier bared your soul. See 16, below. And if, for example, you have explained how you are a new mother or father or have an aging parent to tend, a supervisor may eliminate you as a candidate if (s)he thinks you have too many home commitments.

4. You will have "rights" in most government or NGO jobs. **DO NOT EXERCISE THEM.** This is, of course, an overstatement. But everyone in an office quickly becomes aware of the employee who "works to the rule," that is, does only what is required, makes sure (s)he gets the full, allotted lunch time, never misses an opportunity to go to the gym, leaves on the dot of whatever time the work day is supposed to end. (At one federal agency where I once worked, some employees actually set alarm clocks to ring ten minutes before day's end. The ten minutes were intended to let them clean up their desks, grab their coats, and be prepared to leap up at the appointed hour, when the stampede to the elevator was truly astonishing.) Whatever job you take should be the beginning of a career, not just the beginning of a paycheck.

5. Do not exercise your rights, part II. Some employees go through their careers with chips on their shoulders. If someone looks cross-eyed at them, they will file a complaint with the IG, claiming that their boss is creating a hostile work environment by harassing them, discriminating against them, being mean to them, etc. Soon everyone

knows who these malcontents are and will avoid working with them, promoting them, etc. While they may win a battle or two, they will lose the war, meaning a good, fulfilling career. Don't stumble over quarters to pick up nickels. Of course, if your boss really is hitting on you or making crude racial, ethnic, or sexual jokes, do something. But act temperately.

6. Try to keep your work life and your home life separate. When you are bade a good morning, take this for what it is: a mundane, polite, and meaningless utterance. Do not take this as an invitation to launch into a rant about how your boy/girl friend is mistreating you; how your diet isn't working; or why the Redskins ought to change quarterbacks. Most people aren't going to care and may start to avoid you just to escape the trivial pursuit and the lake of me that are your life. When you have learned the lay of the office land and begun to develop friends, certain personal discussions may arise in a natural way. But you are being paid to work, not to chat the day away.

7. Do not alienate anyone inside or outside your immediate office even if the other person is wrong and obnoxious. Your adversary today may be your boss next month.

8. The most liberating words in the English language are "I don't know." You are inevitably going to be asked work-related questions by your boss. If you don't know the answer say so and immediately add that you will find out the answer to the question. Don't make up an answer. Many bosses have a really good ear for bs.

9. Don't be afraid to ask questions of your boss because you think it suggests your lack of intelligence or his/her inability to communicate. An assignment may contain a nuance that you do not fully understand and that may be the key to the entire assignment. There are few things more frustrating than to spend days on an assignment only to be told that you answered the wrong question.

10. Never embarrass your boss or show up her or him. Your goal is to help, not to show that you are smarter or better educated. At meetings, don't speak unless asked until you understand the relationship you have with your boss. (I am always amazed while watching NCIS or Special Victims Unit to see interrogations conducted by two or three people. On TV, of course, this is to spread the lines among the cast. In real life, if I were interrupted by a colleague during questioning, I would fire him or her.) In a meeting, your boss may deliberately hold back some information not because (s)he forgot it, but for tactical reasons. If there is something that your boss has screwed up, speak to him or her behind closed doors. At meetings, if (s)he misspeaks write a note and surreptitiously slide it in front of him or her.

11. If your boss asks you and others by email for comments on something and if your comments are critical, use the reply button, not the reply all button. See D 4, below.

12. Your boss will ask you for "quick drafts" of things: letters, position papers, comments on legislation, etc. Even if (s)he uses the term "draft," do not take that word seriously. However the assignment is phrased, you are being asked to prepare a complete document, with proper headings and sub-headings, proper format, and fully developed arguments all wrapped in stylish prose that is spell checked and grammatically unassailable. (By the way, never rely exclusively on your computer's spell check. It will not catch misused homonyms or other solecisms that happen to be real words.)

13. It is very likely that your early writings will be heavily edited and rewritten. When this happens, do not sulk or feel insulted. Learn from the experience.

Bureaucracies have different ways of articulating issues. And it is just possible that you are not as good a writer as you thought.

14. Bosses hate surprises! Never surprise him or her (unless on a birthday). The project that just blew up in your face; that angry complaint from Capitol Hill; that embarrassing inquiry from the news media; that “reply all” email that you sent instead of the “reply” response: the only thing worse than having to tell your boss about screw ups is having the boss learn about them on his/her own. Most bosses forgive mistakes since they themselves have made them. By not giving him/her a heads up, you show that not only are you fallible, but you are also a coward.

15. When your boss (or anyone else) calls you to a meeting, take paper and pen with you. Your attendance without these implements bespeaks your view that the meeting is of little importance. Yes, you may have been a waiter at a New York City steak house and can remember without notes all the orders, including how everyone wants his/her steak cooked, for a table of eight. Nevertheless, take pen and paper to meetings even if you do nothing with them but doodle.

16. Beware of the first person who eagerly befriends you in a new office. That person may be the office pariah trying to snare an unwitting ally. Treat everyone the same: pleasantly, politely, professionally. Do not inadvertently find yourself in some sort of office conspiracy or cabal.

17. Avoid office gossip, at least until you understand the office dynamics. When your boss sees you with your best office friend whispering in the office cafeteria, (s)he may take offense.

18. As Woody Allen said, 90% of life is showing up. When a project is due or a hearing is to be held or a meeting convened, show up no matter how you feel. Always post. (I once for fun did a chart for my office showing what days of the week had the most claimed sick leave. As you might expect, Fridays and Mondays had the most sick days, Tuesdays and Thursday far fewer, and Wednesdays the least. What a surprise, since you would think that illnesses would be randomly distributed across all days!)

19. Do try to seek out a positive mentoring relationship. Find someone you respect and seek his/her counsel often. Go to lunch together, for example. (S)he may well be flattered. In some work places it is hard to get ahead without someone more senior clearing a path for you, for example by praising the good work you do. People who benefit from mentors are more likely to return the favor when they are in a position to do so. If mentoring works the way it is supposed to, everyone wins.

## B. Dress

1. Dress professionally. Of course, you may dress with style, with panache. But clothes that draw attention to yourself because they are ultra-sexy or outré will not help you. The office hallway is not the runway.

2. Some work environments are increasingly casual. But most government offices tend to be rather conservative. Use your boss’s dress code as a guide. Some items should never be worn (unless you are going undercover for some spook agency): tank tops, tee shirts, wife-beater shirts, short shorts, halter tops, tennis shoes, sweat pants, flip-flops, etc. In most government offices, the more senior employees dress more formally. The top floors of State, Defense, CIA, for example,

are peopled with men in suits and ties and women in comparable business attire. Your goal is to move up, literally, in these agencies, not down. Shoes should be shined, shirts ironed. Men always look better in long-sleeved business shirts rather than short-sleeved. Get your hair cut regularly and don't wear ill-fitting or ratty clothes, even if they are your favorites. If your office does not routinely wear suits, business shirts, and ties, keep a set in the office for emergency use. You never know when your division or agency head may call you for a meeting.

3. Lose the perfumes, the after shaves, the hair sprays and gels. Over time, their aromas can overpower an office. Avoid extreme or extremely complicated hair styles. Facial hair should be moderate. If you sport tats, cover them up. Reconsider easily visible, extreme facial and body piercings. No boss will ever take you to a meeting if your face/tongue/lips/eyebrows look like they have been riveted, that is even assuming that you are hired in the first place.

4. In sum, if your clothes announce you at all, they should bespeak taste and restraint.

### C. Etiquette

1. Two of the biggest signposts or tip offs that interviewers and bosses notice are table manners and language. Don't let them trip you up. When you eat like Stanley Kowalski or Homer Simpson, they will notice. If you speak ungrammatically or foully, they will notice.

2. Your boss is your boss and not your friend. Memorize that koan! Beware of the office gathering or party. Don't treat these events like frat parties. If you over imbibe, you are likely to do or say things that the next day – if you can even remember them – you will deeply regret. (I once saw the wife of a summer intern at a large office retreat that offered alcoholic drinks, climb up on a table and remove her top. Need I mention that her husband did not get a permanent job offer?)

3. When traveling with the boss, (s)he is still your boss. Even if (s)he has a drink or two at dinner, be wary of joining in. Do not take business travel as a party at the government's expense. Until you know your colleagues well, go to bed early and get up early. Don't hang out at the hotel bar; don't try to pick up anyone, colleague or stranger.

4. Beware of the office romance. Ideally you would find your mate in some other venue. But realistically, many relationships begin at the office. So if you must, be careful. However, NEVER have a relationship with your boss! The odds of this working out well approach zero, and the things that can go wrong are legion and predictable. Here is how it usually works out: 1) After a (usually) brief time, (s)he may dump you or you him or her. That makes work life really rough, and when awkwardness sets in – which is usually very soon after the romance cools – you are likely to be the one who is transferred. 2) While you and the boss will persuade yourselves that your little trysts are invisible to coworkers, they are not. Inevitably, colleagues will find out. See D below. 3) No matter how meritorious your work, they will believe that your promotion or bonus arose only because of your personal relationship. 4) Inevitably, your colleagues will report your boss to the IG on the ground of office favoritism or hostile work environment. And they are likely to win! I cannot overstate how often this happens in offices. If you develop a relationship with someone not your boss, keep it out of the workplace. Try to

make sure that you and (s)he work in different offices so that your professional paths rarely cross.

5. This may seem obvious, but do not rip off the government. Some people rationalize stealing office supplies by noting the huge waste that occurs in all offices, particularly government ones. If you are discovered – even if you are not prosecuted – your reputation is forever shot.

6. Be judicious about reporting your time and attendance. Your time “networking” or “tweeting” or feeling the pain in the office gym might not meet the IG’s definition of legitimate work.

7. Liberally use “yes sir” and “no ma’am.” Politeness really does help.

8. Don’t whine; do smile. Whiners and complainers are immediately and forever branded. No one wants to be around them, and their assignments reflect that. People who readily smile and evince enthusiasm are invited to work on every project.

9. Do not evangelize in your office. Avoid hectoring about religious, political, or social matters. I would avoid aggressive bumper stickers.

10. In most offices, one receives an ethics lecture early on from the general counsel’s office. Pay attention. There is a fair amount of conduct that most of us would think nothing about that in fact violates one government ethics rule or another.

11. Ultimately, the most valuable thing that we possess is our reputations. Guard yours like the jewel it is.

#### D. E-Stuff

1. Beware of everything you do on the internet. Employers are increasingly using Facebook and Google to investigate prospective employees because such inquiries are cheap. Those digital photos of you – hoisting a glass at a bar or in *flagrante delicto* with your lover – may come back to haunt you. Remember, bits and bytes are forever.

2. Try never to use your office IT system for personal stuff. Yeah, of course if a coworker invites you to eat lunch, fine; if your spouse emails you about some household emergency, fine. But personal communications may indeed not be so personal. When you push the delete button, there is no little guy inside your computer putting a match to your deleted communications. Computer forensic experts can often recreate everything you thought you had deleted. The federal government and the state governments of which I am aware sticker their phones and computers alerting you that these machines are the governments’ and not yours. You therefore have no reasonable expectation of privacy under the Fourth Amendment. And in the private sector, there is no question that anything you do on the computer can be monitored. Thus, when you surf the net and pull up some porn or play solitaire your IT folks may be alerted by tracking filters. What seems like an innocent email or search today may some day turn out to bite you. Again, bits and bytes are forever.

3. Beware of sending harsh or over-heated emails. It is likely that through the forward button on computers your email will be shared. Either through innocence or guile your email may go viral and be sent throughout the organization. Eventually the object of your ire will see it. (I once had an employee who, in response to a mass mailing inviting people to an agency-sanctioned event, blasted the sender for wasting his time. Instead of pushing the reply button, he pushed the reply all button. As a result his

ridiculous, petty diatribe was seen by thousands of his coworkers, including all the senior leadership.)

4. You, along with many other addressees, will frequently be asked to comment by email on draft papers or letters or ideas. If your comments are critical or lengthy, be polite and push the reply button, not the reply all button. The party who is seeking comments will appreciate your consideration in not making public the disdain you have for his/her draft.

5. Concerning particularly sensitive and contentious issues, ponder whether you really should use email. The advantage of email, of course, is that it provides a record of your advice. The disadvantage is that it provides a record of your advice. Emails are subject to FOIA requests. Your boss may appreciate an oral communication on some potentially embarrassing or sensitive matters.

6. About every use of your computer ask yourself two questions: a) would I care if my boss saw this document or read this email? b) would I be embarrassed if this document or this email appeared in the Washington Post or the New York Times?