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Did I just say that? Appropriate language for the office

One of the blessings and curses of being in college for four years is that you are surrounded, largely, by people your own age. You speak a common language, share a generation's priorities and experiences, and have a similar understanding of what's right and wrong, appropriate and inappropriate. When you enter the working world, you start to mingle more closely with people of different ages and from different walks of life. Things change a little, including the lingo.



What might be considered a harmless joke to you and your friends could be offensive to someone else. What might be acceptable slang to your favorite T.A. might not fly in a multi-recipient company email. We spoke to several working professionals to get their insight into how you can best understand what is and isn't okay verbal behavior in corporate America.

Stop, um, doing that

Life coach and motivational speaker Stacia Pierce advises grads that late nights out and weekend festivities aren't wise conversation topics at work, even though you might be in the habit of sharing such info with your friends. It's also time to stop swearing and using "like" and "um" because of the way it will make people see you. Your coworkers will only take you as seriously as you're willing to behave.

On the subject of swearing - also called "cursing," "cussing" or just "being a potty mouth" -etiquette expert and author April Masini points out the following: "There's a difference between your workplace and your social life -- and just because you may use curse words or even intent in acronyms like 'LMAO' outside of work - they are not appropriate for the work place. So follow this rule of thumb: Anything with a curse word in it - even 'LMAO' - is inappropriate for the office."

When in Rome

While it is smart to err on the side of caution, especially when you're new, you will learn from observing what the boundaries are for humor and conversation in your specific office. Not all places of business adhere to the same conduct, and cultures vary from one industry to the next.

"There are different types of corporate environments," says Simon Vainrub, principal at Chattanooga, Tenn.-based Vain Advertising. "[In] the ad industry I have heard X-rated discussions, cursing and yelling, although it doesn't happen 24/7. You should remember the adage, 'when in Rome, do as the Romans do,' and follow your coworkers and, most importantly, your managers."

The cost of being too casual

Speaker and corporate trainer Marlene Caroselli, author of "Jesus, Jonas and Janus: The Leadership Triumvirate," shares this anecdote to remind grads that there can be consequences to choosing the wrong words: "Margaret, a recent college grad, accepted a receptionist position to get her foot in the door of a firm that housed her future, she believed. A multi-national company, the CEO called one day from Canada [and] asked for the general manager. Margaret informed him, 'He ain't done come back from lunch yet.' She was terminated that very day."

Caroselli's general guideline? "I recommend that new hires, for the first six months at least, speak to colleagues as if they were grandparents," she says.

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