Nhiem: Hello everyone and welcome to another edition of Career Cast. I’m Nhiem Cao and today we have a special guest. Kevin Oden, a fellow 2011 MBA candidate, is joining me today to talk about business etiquette. How you carry yourself and how you treat others is very important in business today. Before we get started, Kevin why don’t you tell us a little about yourself.

Kevin: Thanks Nhiem, I’m excited to be here. As you already stated, my name is Kevin Oden and I have an undergraduate degree in industrial engineering. I’ve got a couple years of experience consulting in industry. I’m a first year MBA student and I’m very concerned with business etiquette in the world today.

Nhiem: Good stuff, Kevin, so let’s get into this. What are some things you think of when someone mentions business etiquette?

Kevin: Well, this can be a pretty general area, but I think the main things I think about are relationships, meetings, and email. I also think about some structural things like what to do at business dinners and how to appropriately greet new people.

Nhiem: Those are some good points, Kevin. This is going to be at least a two part series. We’ll focus on those major things, relationships, meetings, and email, this time and save business dinner, attire, and other caveats for next time. So let’s go ahead and dive into the relationship portion of our discussion. What do you think about when you say relationship?

Kevin: I think about respect and courtesy. I’ve found in my experience that it is very important to be respectful of others in their beliefs, culture, race, religion, and so on. I don’t always consciously think about all of these things when I’m in interacting with someone, but I do try to treat others the way that I would like to be treated.

Nhiem: The “Golden Rule” is a very good guide in etiquette. If you are ever in question about how someone might react to something you say or do, simply ask yourself, “How would this make me feel?” The way you talk to other people can affect the perception of others around you. What are some things to think about when talking with people one-on-one?

Kevin: First off think about where you are. Is this a public area or is this a private office? I think self-control is key in one-on-one situations. Be mindful of the things you say cause once the words come out it can often be difficult to take them back. You should never raise your voice, as this shows lack of self-control. Remember the person you’re speaking with will develop an opinion of you and may also share that opinion with others. Harsh or derogatory language should never be used. You’re educated use vocabulary that shows that you’re educated.

Nhiem: Another thing to think about is developing relationships with peers and subordinates. This country was built on a foundation of equality, that all people are created equal. You should treat those under you with the same respect as those above you. For example, your future administrative assistant can have a huge influence on how efficient and effective you are. It’s important to develop a good working relationship with this person, after all they are a representation of you. He or she is often times
the first contact for people coming to see you. So their perception of you will affect the way in which they present you. Another group of people that are often ignored is the janitorial staff. Think about when someone comes in the building they often times need help finding a person and the janitorial staff is often the ones they ask. So if you had treated the janitor poorly in the past and someone asks for directions to your office, how do you think that janitor would react? He might say “Why do you want to see that jerk?” This is why it’s so important to treat everyone with respect and develop good relationships.

Kevin: Yeah, it’s just good practice to be nice to everyone. There was a study done in 1997 by Manchester Partners International that said that 40% of new management hires fail in their first jobs. The main reason cited for their failure is their inability to develop good relationships with their peers and their subordinates.

Nhiem: 40%? That’s huge. A good way to develop these relationships is to come to work a little early or spend a little extra time visiting with the people that work around you. Share a little bit about yourself and try to get to know the people. Just the other day I talked with a friend of mine who works for an ad agency out in San Francisco, and he told me about an employee who was recently let go because of his inability to work with other people. Apparently the guy had a bad attitude and was a drain to be around. He had been with the company for 8 years when the managers decided they had enough. Don’t be that guy.

Kevin: Seems like there are a lot of people out there that go to work, just to go to work. People spend a lot of time at work, developing relationships often makes the job much more enjoyable.

Nhiem: I know developing relationships in our MBA classes has made the classes more enjoyable. It’s an important part of our development, this peer-to-peer interaction. What about meetings, Kevin? I think this is one of your pet peeves isn’t it?

Kevin: Yeah one thing I hate is when people show up late to meetings. Is their time more important than others? Think about this. Let’s say there was a meeting scheduled for 10 people. One person is 15 minutes late. There is a monetary cost that can be associated with that tardiness. Let’s assume on average everyone coming to meeting makes on average an hourly rate of $40. That one person being 15 minutes late has cost the company $100. That’s $100 per meeting, multiply that out by the number of meetings in a day or in a year. One person being consistently late can cost a company thousands of dollars over the course of a year. In addition to that cost, it is also disrespectful. So if you’re going to be late or not show up let someone know so that it’s not a surprise. That’s a very simple courtesy. Everyone should practice that.

Nhiem: Another thing I don’t like about meetings is that some are not very focused. The purpose of meetings should not be to have meetings. Who ever is in charge of the meeting should clearly spell out the objective of the meeting beforehand so that everyone attending can be prepared and involved. Enough about meetings for now, I’m sure we could have a whole Career Cast on that topic alone.
Kevin: Alright let’s move on to emails. Remember that your company email is tracked and is the property of the company. Try to use your business email accounts for business. If a company is looking to downsize, they can use your email inbox as a way to justify letting you go. In this economic downturn be respectful of the company resources and don’t give them a reason to release you.

Nhiem: I remember one time a company I was working for went through a downsizing and they looked at email records and internet activity. I’m sure we’ve all been guilt of forwarding a funny email that had nothing to do with work, but I think the best practice is to avoid this altogether or at least minimize these activities.

Kevin: Yeah, one of the first things a company hands you when you’re hired is a handbook. Usually somewhere in that handbook are some guidelines on internet and email usage. Most new employees overlook this portion.

Nhiem: Some other formalities about emails that should be considered are making the subject clear and to the point. Try not to be ambiguous. Some people get hundreds of emails a day so if you make your subject clear they may get to your email sooner. Also make sure there is some structure to your email. You’re writing skills should be put to use here. Pay attention to spelling and grammar. After all the email may be the only representation of you that the other person has, and you don’t want to make a bad impression.

Kevin: Very true. So in summary I’d say that in business the best advice is to be respectful of others and yourself. Try to have a positive attitude. Be on time, and don’t waste other’s time.

Nhiem: That sounds about right. So in closing, do your best and try to be the best person you can be. Thank you for listening today and please tune in for the next exciting installment of the Career Cast. Next time we’ll be discussing business dinner etiquette, appropriate attire, and other business etiquette caveats. So until then, this is Nhiem Cao telling you to stay safe and stay focused.