

Three Tips To Ensure A Professional Workplace



POST WRITTEN BY **Jen Brown**

Jen Brown is Founder of [The Engaging Educator](#), Three-time TEDx Speaker and firm believer in the power of Yes, And Communication



"Never have I caused someone to get stitches."

Remember this game? Never Have I Ever: that game you played at slumber parties when your mom closed the door or maybe at some party with your crush in high school. I remember it fondly, actually. Recently, those memories surfaced when a client told me that one of their senior staff members brought the now card game into an orientation lunch for a new senior staffer.

From the [#MeToo silence breakers](#) to articles inspired by New Year's resolutions cautioning against emails that [burn bridges](#), the idea of professionalism is in the spotlight now more than ever, and rightly so. As a business owner with a staff that happens to also consult businesses on communication issues and development, I've seen the best and worst of workplace behavior. While every organization might draw their own lines when it comes to casual versus workplace behavior, I've found that three major rules apply to creating a professional work environment that builds a level of comfort for all employees.

- **Your work is not your family.** How often have you been part of a team or interviewed a new prospect and said the words, "We are all family here!" Stop that. You aren't family. You are co-workers. The idea of calling someone family may seem warm and welcoming. But what about people who have a manipulative family? Or no family? And then they might feel like they can never, ever let you down, that they have to overachieve to please you, and that you allow passive-aggressive mother-like guilt trips and manipulation. One coaching client actually told me during busy sales periods at her last job, the founder would tell them all they had to stay and work because "they couldn't let the family go hungry this winter." This was after a few 50-plus hour works -- without overtime or an end in sight. Take the emotion you want to inspire with "family" and find another phrase. May I recommend: "We're a great team?"

- **If it's a sleepover activity, it's not appropriate for work.** This one comes into play with teambuilding and "get to know you" moments in office culture. A few drinks at happy hour? OK.

Any more than that? Nope. That earlier example of someone bringing in Never Have I Ever cards during a lunch at work was real. I get that we all want to be friendly with staff and co-workers and be the cool boss and cool employee. But there is a huge difference between friendly and friends and being friends with people you work with is not necessarily the best idea. It's worse when you are in charge. Sure, most people won't take advantage of the friend situation. But the moment someone does take advantage of that friendship, respect goes down in flames. If something conjures images of sleepovers, dates, girls nights out or bachelor parties, then it's not good for company bonding or teambuilding. We're often charged with teambuilding focused workshops and we make a point to keep things on a professional level.

- **Respect other's work-life balance.** Not all work-life balances are created equal and it's widely accepted that [non-stop work hurts your wellbeing](#) more than it helps your career. One client of mine worked with a few employees who had a limited "life" part of their work-life balance. They were at work almost every single moment and started to get incredibly snappy when my client wasn't there all the time. Nevermind that she was the founder of the company. Their comments (and guilt) when she left at 6 p.m. to spend time with her family and friends were eating her alive. Here's the thing: They made a choice to work more than expected. The comments of "Well, I'm in a place where my work is more important than my life," were inappropriate and, even more so, disrespectful. If you are in a position where work is in a place that bears more weight than life, great. That's your position. Same for the flipside. Your hustle doesn't have to be everyone else's hustle. Respect the boundaries and choices people make.

All three of these ideas boil down to one simple concept: Respect one another and respect yourself. What have you learned about respect in managing your business?