

Nosy, rude co-workers? 10 etiquette moves to stay on top

They're in every office. Nosy, rude and even outright hostile co-workers drag you down. What's worse, they distract you from your work, threaten your career and drain you emotionally.

When a co-worker asks you a way-too-personal question, here are 6 polite ways to respond to her prying questions:

- **"What's your salary?" Strategy:** Be vague. *Response:* "I do OK" or "I'd like to make more."
- **"What did you do on your date last night?" Strategy:** Use a little humor. The asker probably just wants to find out if you had a good time. So tell him. *Response:* "The usual: dinner, dancing, hot-air-balloon ride. No, really, we had a great time."
- **"How much did you pay for that outfit?" Strategy:** Feign a bad memory. *Response:* "I don't remember" or "Not that much."
- **"What were you talking about?" Strategy:** The asker probably wants an entrance into a conversation. Dodge the question and try to include her. *Response:* "Nothing much. Now, tell us: How was your vacation in Tahiti?"
- **"What was your doctor's appointment for?" Strategy:** Don't feel compelled to give details. A vague answer will send the message that you don't want to go into it. *Response:* "I'm just fine; thanks for asking."
- **"How old are you?" Strategy:** Exaggerate or let your body language answer for you. *Response:* Claim a ridiculous age, such as 91, or say "I'm aging rapidly just thinking about it." A shrug or a raised eyebrow can send a "don't go there" signal.

When a jaw-droppingly rude email arrives in your inbox, follow these steps:

1. **Draft the email you wish you could send.** Then file it away and revisit in a day or so. Your first instinct may be to say something you'll later regret.
2. **Start with, "Thank you."** Even if the other person is off-base, begin by thanking her for contacting you and offering feedback. You'll defuse the tension. It also protects your reputation, should the other person forward your email.
3. **Volunteer to get on the phone.** By email, outline the facts that support your point of view. If it's a more personal matter, though, offer to phone her, so you can have a more productive conversation.
4. **Call her out.** When someone crosses every line in the book—calling you names, making untrue accusations—let her know that the behavior isn't appropriate. Tell her that in future conversations, you'd appreciate it if she could keep her tone professional.