

Excel with *etiquette*

Manners mistakes can hurt your current and future business relationships. Find out how to avoid a faux pas in these real-world scenarios.

Compiled by Summer Mandell

What should you do when your clients are absorbed with their smartphones, another Texas REALTOR® has bad manners, or you say something that may have offended your client? Marjorie Brody, an executive coach, answers these questions and more. Brody is CEO of Brody Professional Development (BrodyPro.com) and the author of more than 25 books, including *Help! Was That a Career-Limiting Move?*

It's important to me to be available to my clients, so my phone is always on me. Is there an acceptable way for me to take phone calls or reply to text messages when I'm with a prospect or client?

If you are expecting an important text or call, let people know up front. You could say, "As you know, I like to be available, and I certainly want to give you my full attention. However, I'm expecting this call or text. When it comes, please excuse me for a couple of minutes and I'll get right back to you."

If you aren't expecting an important call or text, turn off or silence your phone and spend your time focusing on the person you're with. We get so distracted by the phone that once we've heard it go off, we think we have to get to it, and then we're not present, and clients can feel it.

If you must check your phone, you might excuse yourself to the bathroom to do it. Respond to people right away and tell them you're with another client. I would leave that on a voicemail message as well. For example, "I'm currently helping another client, and I will get back to you as soon as I possibly can."

My sellers like to stay at their house during showings and follow buyers around. They think it's a good way to get feedback, but I've explained why they shouldn't be there. There's a showing scheduled next week and they told me they plan to stick around. Is there a polite way to tell them "no," or should I just let them stay?

I think you need to position it better from the beginning. You should say, "In my experience, when the homeown-

ers are present, it ultimately becomes more of a detriment to the sale and a distraction. You've hired me to represent you. Let me do my job."

If they insist on being there, it's your choice whether to push the issue. You could also say, "Here's what I do recommend: If you want to be in the house, remove yourself from the tour and let me, as your REALTOR®, represent you. And then at the end when the buyers are ready to leave, you can see if there are any specific questions they have."

The other agents in my office like to have water cooler chats about how much they've done in sales. I don't like talking about this with them, but they give me a hard time. Is there anything I can say that will get them off my back without being rude?

Take a look at why you are so resistant to sharing. I encourage my salespeople to share what they've done because when someone is doing well, it's interesting how



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it spurs others to as well. If this is in fact just a one-upmanship situation, then maybe say, "Wow, that's great! Tell me how you did that." You don't have to answer yourself, but you could compliment the others.

One of my clients is negative about everything. I am at my wits' end trying to please her, but I want to make sure she gets what she wants. Is there a way to discuss her negative attitude with her?

I would confront her in a positive way. Say, "It sounds as though you're having some trouble with this whole process. What's really going on?" There's always a reason behind the reaction.

Ask open-ended questions to get to the root of the problem. If the person doesn't want to sell her house but has to for financial reasons, then ask what you could do to make it better for her. Sometimes, people just want to talk. You're part therapist in any sales job.

Finally, don't argue with her. Don't take it personally. You're not going to make everyone happy. And if you find it's too draining, you might have to consider terminating your contract together.

My clients are consumed with their mobile devices whenever I meet with them. Is there a polite way to ask them for their full attention?

I would simply say, "We're going to be meeting for the next 15 or 30 minutes. In order to finish this as quickly and well as we can to get the results you're looking for, I'm going to ask you to put all of your electronic devices on mute so we can get through it."

Or, you could say, "Are you expecting any urgent calls or texts in the next 25 minutes? Because if not, I find that it works best for my clients when we focus and turn off all electronic devices."

Be prepared for pushback. It's up to you to decide

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Have an etiquette question you want answered? Email editor@texasrealtors.com and it might be in a future issue of the magazine.

how far to take it. It comes back to how patient you want to be, how distracting it is, and how much time it's wasting. Your time is valuable, too.

I just closed a deal with my buyers. The seller's agent was never on time, answered a personal call during an important meeting without leaving the room, and frequently addressed my female client as "honey." After the deal was over, my clients said the other agent was unprofessional, and I have to agree. Despite his unprofessional demeanor, I like him and don't want it to hurt his business. Should I tell him what my clients and I observed, or just mind my own business?

People are often unaware that their behavior is inappropriate or offensive. I don't think he went out of his way to be offensive; he's just ignorant of the impact his behavior is having on others.

You have to ask yourself, would you want that feedback, and are you willing to risk the consequences of telling him? You're sticking your neck out to help this other person. You have to question if your motivation truly is to help, and realize that person might get annoyed.

If you're really coming from a caring place, you can say, "Look, Tom, I want to give you some feedback. Are you open to that?" And if he says "no," then you say "OK" and walk away. If he says "yes," then say, "I want you to be aware that my client was very unhappy with some of the behavior you demonstrated, and here are three examples of that. And my concern is that she's going to tell other people about that, and they won't be using you."

If a client or colleague has spinach in his teeth or an unbuttoned button or similar problem, should I mention it?

Yes. The rule of thumb is, if anything can be corrected immediately, do it. Give the feedback, because you probably wouldn't want to walk around with spinach in your teeth or your button unbuttoned.

If you can pull someone aside, do it. And if it's a

bra strap showing or fly open, if there is someone of the same gender, you might ask him or her to tell the other person. On the other hand, we're all adults. But do it in private if possible, or with nonverbal gestures by pointing, so they get an idea and you don't call attention to everyone about it.

I said something that seemed to offend my client—I could see it on his face—but I don't know what I said. Should I ignore it or ask and apologize?

Say, "It seems from your reaction I said something that might have offended you, and I'm so sorry if that is the case. Please help me understand what it was so I won't do it again."

My client constantly interrupts me, often changing the topic. It's wasting a lot of time. How can I keep the discussion on topic?

This is a tough one because it's hard to give your clients feedback about this. In this situation, I would just keep bringing it back to the topic at hand. "We were talking about X; let's just stay with that."

Point it out in a way that is not accusatory and not attacking, just controlling the conversation. Say, "I want to be respectful of your time, so let's make sure that the questions stay on target so I can help you get what you're looking for."

A former client added me as a friend on my personal Facebook profile. I like to use my personal profile for close friends and family only, but I don't want to seem rude. What should I do?

People have to make their own boundaries. First of all, you could defriend somebody or not accept him as a friend. That's OK. You could also say, "I want you to be aware that I only have immediate family and friends on my Facebook."

Do you have a LinkedIn account you could use? That's where you could send anyone who is connected to you professionally. You could say, "For a professional relationship, which you and I have, it would be best to go through LinkedIn." ★

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