

Professional Etiquette & Tips to Maximize Your Applied Practice Experience

Professional Etiquette

Learn the organization's culture & policies

The organization's culture is how they do things (dress, work, take lunch breaks etc.) which are based on the values and belief of the people in the organization. Observe and pay attention to the organization's culture—its people---what do they believe, how do they act/work and what do they value. If possible, review the organization's official policies (employee handbooks) and understand sometimes rules or expectations are not always in writing but can be part of the culture.

Perhaps, during your first week at the organization you can ask your preceptor or other co-workers about locating any employee handbook, communication etiquette (Do people prefer email or should I just stop by someone's office if I have a question?), breaks or lunch schedules, office attire, and other protocols.

Dress

Try to ask your preceptor about the organization's dress code (dressy, business casual, casual) before you begin the applied practice experience. This is important because first impressions matter! If you are unsure, maybe dress up the first day and observe what others are wearing. Is everyone else wearing suits? Are others in jeans? Again, take some time observe the organization's culture.

Communication

When you are communicating (over the phone, email, in person) with others at the organization or external partners be professional, polite, and respectful.

Specifically, when drafting emails, they should have an introduction, body, and signature. An email is like writing a letter to someone and it is different than texting someone so make sure you spell out all the words you are using in an email. Lastly, be sure to respond to emails in a timely fashion (2-3 business days is standard business etiquette) and if you will be out of the office set up an automatic message to notify people and let them know when you will return.

Why Writing Email Is a Skill—and Why Learning It Matters

<https://business.tutsplus.com/articles/why-writing-email-is-a-skill-and-why-learning-it-matters-cms-20655>

Attendance/Punctuality

Make sure to arrive on time and if you have to miss work because of an illness or emergency notify your preceptor immediately.

Forgo the Technology

Turn your cellphone on mute and don't spend time at work responding to personal messages. Also, don't bring your cell phone to meetings and respond to messages on your phone during the meetings. When you are in meetings, be present, listen, observe, and be respectful of the people speaking by giving them your undivided attention. You are there to learn and if you are not on your phone the whole time, this gives you the opportunity to do that and engage/network with the people around you.

Do the work

This sounds obvious but preceptors have found students watching movies at their desks or shopping online. You want the preceptor to see you as someone who has a strong work ethic. If possible, ask your preceptor for other tasks if you find you have a lot of down-time.

Tips to Maximize Your Applied Practice Experience

Learning objectives/goal setting

Before you begin the applied practice experience, you will draft learning objectives. These will help identify specific tasks you will work on during your experience. But, remember to remain open to new learning opportunities throughout the experience.

It also might be a good idea to take a few moments to self-reflect and jot down some thoughts as you think about what you hope to learn and achieve during this experience.

Ask questions

Remember you are not expected to know everything and this experience is part of your learning. So ask questions and be curious. The more you ask questions the more you will learn.

Take Initiative

Preceptors will be impressed if you are willing to step up and take the lead on projects/tasks. Again, if you find yourself with a lot of down-time ask your preceptor if there are other projects you can work on and be open to joining task forces or committees while working at an organization. Joining committees and task forces can enhance your skills and build your public health network. Yet, be mindful that you do not take too much on so you have time to complete all your tasks well and on time.

Expand your network in public health

You should see this as an opportunity to meet other public health professionals. Be open to any opportunity that allows you to talk to or work with various people in the organization. Not only is this ideal to learn from several people in the organization (who have different roles and skills), it also helps grow your contacts in the industry. In addition, attend events and make sure to foster relationships with those you have authentically connected with by asking them to grab a cup of coffee and/or send them a LinkedIn invitation so you can stay in touch after the applied practice experience.

Build Good Relationships with Co-workers

In order to build your network, it is important to be mindful and intentional about building good relationships with your co-workers. It also makes work a more enjoyable place to be! Make sure to build relationships based on trust, mutual respect, self-awareness, and open/effective communication.

Building Great Work Relationships: Making Work Enjoyable and Productive

<https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/good-relationships.htm>

Show Gratitude

After your applied practice experience, make sure to thank those you worked with for the opportunity to work with them and the organization. The “thank you” gesture is often determined by your relationship with that person, the organization’s culture, and perceived preferences for acknowledgement. For instance, the gesture can be an email, a card, or you can treat a co-worker to a cup of coffee.

Reflection: Overall Career Goals

After the applied practice experience take some time to document some key projects and tasks you completed during the experience. Make sure to include this information on your resume and in your LinkedIn Profile.

Also, reflect on how this experience ties into your career goals or your vision for where you would like to work in the future. What was your favorite part of this experience? What projects and tasks did you enjoy the most? These type of questions and reflection can help you determine what type of job you want or what type of public health leader you would like to be.

You can also schedule an appointment with the [UIC SPH Career Services office](#) to discuss your applied practice experience and come up with strategies to leverage your insights and contacts in the next phase of your career.