



ETHICS CONNECTION

HONORING INDIVIDUALS

WHILE CREATING A COHESIVE TEAM

BY KRISTIN KLINEFELTER, MS, RDN, LDN

THE CULINARY TEAM APPEARED HAPPY AND READY

to serve the evening meal. They were wearing clean aprons, along with branded baseball caps, tucked-in shirts, non-slip shoes, name tags, and—most importantly—smiles. The clients at Happy Hills Assisted Living thought they lived in paradise. The staff was so friendly and truly treated them, and each other, like family. They couldn't be luckier.

However, just like most families, the culinary team at Happy Hills had their conflicts. Jose didn't enjoy wearing the baseball cap because it made him feel like a teenager. Linda wondered why she needed to wear the ugly black shoes because she was a server and did not need to go into the dishroom or fry area. Lars and Lena constantly bickered about family situations (they indeed were related by blood). Jamie never felt like part of the team because their co-workers would not call them by their desired pronouns (which were they/them/theirs). We could go on and on about the HR struggles and "people problems" that Kjel, the CDM, CFPP, dealt with on any given day. She wondered if it would just be easier to open a daycare. Kjel really tried to focus on being kind, inclusive, curious, and consistent. In fact, she often repeated this mantra when listening to her team express their concerns. After all, isn't it important and ethical to treat all team members with respect and honor their individuality? Absolutely!

As a certified dietary manager, certified food protection professional you are a coach building a team-like atmosphere. Every person has their position and brings different strengths to the team. In what situations are we able to allow individuality while still winning as a team, wearing our uniforms and performing the job safely and

effectively? How can we be curious to learn more about our team members in order to understand them without crossing unethical lines? There can be some sticky situations that do not have a Policy & Procedure or Protocol to help guide us through. We are charged with responding to them ethically—without judgment or criticism—because we are ethical, awesome human beings!

UNIFORMS: THE SAME, YET DIFFERENT

Uniforms are worn for safety, to identify roles or departments, and for function. When employees are hired, they know what their uniform is and sign that they agree to comply with the uniform policy. Where can you allow individual style with the uniform, and with hair and jewelry?

Hair Standards

- Must be tied back and/or covered in food service.
- Facial hair must be covered, or length must comply with department policy.
- Cleanliness is important.

Hair Individuality

- Hair color and style: almost anything goes as long as there are no hairpieces or accessories that present a food safety hazard.

Jewelry

- Rings: a band is acceptable. Large rings may rip gloves and should not be worn.



- Earrings: policies may vary. The FDA Food Code states that one, single facial piercing is permitted in all foodservice or prep areas. However, septum piercings are not permitted. Stud earrings are allowed in foodservice and prep areas.
- Any jewelry that is not worn on your hands or arms—such as earrings, necklaces or facial jewelry—is technically allowed, as per the Food Code.

Shirts/Pants

- Variable within uniform standards.
- Consider having T-shirt Day or themed days periodically.
- Consider laundering uniforms in-house, or send out to help employees comply with cleanliness standards.

Shoes

- Must be non-slip, covering entire foot for safety reasons.



A PREFERRED NAME

may connect a person to their identity, such as a person who is biologically born male but identifies as female and prefers to be called by a traditionally female name.

- Some fun colors and brands are now available.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Many people have legal names and preferred names. For example, a “Susan” may prefer “Sue,” or “Robert” goes by “Bob.” A preferred name may also connect a person to their identity, such as a person who is biologically born male but identifies as female and prefers to be called by a traditionally female name. People may also prefer to be called by pronouns that they identify with. You may have noticed this distinction in people’s signature blocks on email or on name tags. Addressing someone by their preferred name or pronoun may take practice. If you mistakenly call someone by the wrong name or pronoun, simply apologize and correct yourself. You may even state something like: “I am sorry—I know

you prefer to go by *they*. I will make sure I remember this. It is also OK for you to remind me.”

Not all work communication is comfortable, but it must be ethical. Using a person’s preferred name can improve their workplace experience and satisfaction. Sara Holquist, Director of Diversity and Corporate Social Responsibility for ADP, employee HR and payroll systems, states: “You risk disengagement by not using an employee’s preferred name or chosen name. We are interested in promoting engagement and belonging. Not using a person’s preferred or chosen name can create disengagement and compromise their sense of belonging to their team and organization.”

While we should honor a person’s choice of name and pronouns at work by how we address them, post schedules and print name tags, there are reasons to know their legal name. All payroll and HR files need to have legal names in order to comply with payroll tax reporting and employee files.

COMMUNICATION DELIVERY

The purpose of communication in the workplace is to deliver an intended message to an intended person or group of people.

Communication helps to convey thoughts and messages to another person, and helps to clarify the mindset of one person to another. If we are not clear with our verbal, written, and non-verbal communication, others may make assumptions and the message may be taken as hurtful, inappropriate, or unethical. As stated earlier, not all work communication is comfortable, but it must be ethical.

If you feel uncomfortable in certain work situations, it is OK to sit with that and explore the possible reason why. Do you have past experiences that led you to feel uncomfortable in this situation? Do you need to learn more about this topic or person? Uncomfortable feelings are not bad feelings. They should simply be acknowledged and used as information.

This is a good time to mention a simple definition of ethics. If we think of ethics as simply *doing the right thing in every situation*, we are led to ethical communication and behavior. How we communicate with our teams and colleagues says a lot about our character. Notice if your written or spoken

language conveys blame or shame and be mindful of tone, even on emails and texts.

Examples of messages that convey blame or shame can include:

- General blanket statements about a person: “you always” or “you never.”
- Claiming righteousness or superiority: “I knew it!” or “See, I told you.”
- Bringing up a person’s insecurities: “This is why you get into these situations!”

If you are questioning delivery of your message, it’s a smart idea to run it past a trusted colleague.

Appropriate Communication Methods with Team Members:

- Email: if sending a group email, use BCC so addresses are kept private.
- Texting: use only if you are using an approved app or program that the employee signs up for (like GroupMe or Remind).
- Posting memos or posters: do not include names or sensitive information such as phone numbers.

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Inappropriate Communication Methods with Team Members:

- Texting using the individual’s personal phone number.
- Direct messaging (DMs) on social media.
- Posting on someone’s social media page or story.
- Being friends or following on social media.
- Posting about social events that are held outside of work.

If you feel overwhelmed by the aforementioned digital methods of communication, you are not alone. In the past two decades, our modes of communication have changed dramatically. We now have as many as 30 ways to digitally connect with employees and colleagues!

Ethical Digital Communication

- Remember your digital footprint. Anytime you send information digitally, it is “out there” for anyone to see and repost. In some states, emails can be used as evidence

in a court of law. A person can also be terminated for inappropriate use of work email.

- If you are upset or have strong emotions, do not hit “send.” It is fine to draft an email to get initial thoughts out of your brain, but do not address the message or send it for at least 24 hours.
- Word your messages carefully. Remember that human warmth or empathy often cannot be read in emails.
- Avoid emailing when the topic is sensitive. Arrange a face-to-face meeting or a phone call to discuss highly-sensitive topics like job performance, constructive feedback or criticism, or to address complaints and concerns.
- Ask yourself: “if this email is forwarded, how will I feel?”
- Using all capital letters conveys SHOUTING. Avoid this at all times.

Communicating Difficult Topics

- Focus on the behavior, not the person: “Taking outdated products home is stealing and against our department policy. Therefore, according to our employee handbook agreement, you are terminated effective immediately.”

- Be open to honesty and vulnerability: “I noticed that your day seems like it is frustrating you. Can we talk about it before you leave today?”
- Be resourceful: “I am not able to discuss this with you, but here is the HR director’s email address. She can help you work this out.”
- Stay objective: “Your shift starts at 9:00 am. Please be prepared to punch in at 8:55 am. The timeclock report shows that you have punched in more than 10 minutes late four times.”
- Be inclusive: “You are an important part of this team and I expect you to be positive. If you feel like you need a break, please let me know.”

SUMMING IT UP

We are operating a department to serve our customers with dignity and respect. The people that work in the department are also customers. They have individual needs, styles, identities, and skills. The manager’s role is to honor these individuals while building a cohesive team. You are the coach and leader of this team. Now go be awesome! 🍌



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Kristin Klinefelter has been practicing in the nutrition and dietetics field since 1998. She was proud to serve on the Certifying Board for Dietary Managers for six years, and was happy when ANFP and the Academy started requiring Ethics CE. Last year, she facilitated ethics webinars or wrote about ethics for a total of 10 hours, while almost forgetting to log her one-hour of Ethics CPEs! Now *that* might have been a sticky ethical dilemma!

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This **Level I PERSONNEL AND COMMUNICATION** article assumes that the reader has introductory knowledge of the topic. The desired outcome is to ensure a basic understanding and explanation of the concepts of the subject matter and recalling of related facts.

Reading *Honoring Individuals While Creating a Cohesive Team* and successfully completing these questions online in the ANFP Marketplace has been approved for 1 hour of Ethics continuing education for CDM, CFPPs. To earn 1 Ethics CE hour, visit www.ANFPonline.org/market and select **Edge CE Articles** within the Publications section. Purchase the article and complete the quiz.

- The purpose of uniforms is:
 - For personal and food safety reasons
 - To portray a cohesive team and brand
 - Both A and B
- An employee can display their individual sense of style by:
 - Having a unique hair color
 - Wearing elaborate and bold jewelry
 - Wearing whatever shoes they think are cute
- Which statement is *true* about calling a person by their preferred name?
 - A person can use their preferred name on their name tag (as long as it is not offensive to others)
 - All HR paperwork can be in the person's preferred name instead of their legal name
 - Their paycheck can be written to their preferred name
- Not all work communication is _____, but it must be _____.
 - Necessary, documented
 - Comfortable, ethical
 - Serious, legible
- Which statement is an example of focusing on the behavior and not the person?
 - "You need to watch what you say"
 - "You always speak too loudly when talking about diet orders"
 - "Remember that when we discuss diet orders, our voice needs to be at a level 2"
- Sending an email to terminate someone is ethical.
 - True
 - False
- What is an ethical and appropriate way to respond if someone corrects us because we addressed them by a pronoun or name they do not identify with?
 - "I apologize. You told me that you prefer to use the pronouns he/him/his and I will work on that. Thank you for correcting me"
 - "That is not what your application says, so I need to call you by your legal name"
 - "They is plural so this is confusing to me"



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