



GENERAL DIRECTIONS FOR CONDUCT IN צניעות AT THE WORKPLACE

At many places of work it is common that both men and women work together. This is a situation which has the potential for various stumbling blocks due to the constant interaction between them. Therefore before accepting work in a mixed environment it is necessary to enquire first if the atmosphere and the work conditions are proper and conducive to maintaining the correct standards. Sometimes one would have to ask a שאלה from a competent authority. Ideally, one should only work in a "men only" or "women only" department. In any event where this is not practical, the following standards must be adhered to consistently. These standards are הלכה, not extra stringencies. In previous generations they were obvious as accepted practice.

1. Male and female workers should not converse together about anything not directly related to their work, e.g. news or politics. This is even when there are several people together and certainly not one to one. Even if the purpose of the conversation is to draw the other closer to Yiddishkeit it is still forbidden. They should refrain from non-work related conversations even on the telephone or on meeting co-incidentally on the street or in a public place.
2. Any necessary work-related conversations should be conducted formally with no signs of familiarity or of personal interaction. One should refrain from joking or any other frivolous manner of speech.
3. Outside of work hours they should refrain from talking on the phone even about work issues and where absolutely necessary a message should be given e.g. through a husband or father.
4. Never should they address each other by first names – always by surname with the appropriate title (Mr, Mrs, Rabbi, Miss, etc).
5. Although one may greet in a general term, like "Good Morning" but the utmost care must be taken not to use a more personal term like "How are you?" It is important to be very careful to maintain the correct etiquette in this respect because one can very easily slip into creating a personal relationship in this way. It cannot be over-emphasised that this is an absolute הלכה and not a חומרא. (ע' קידושין דף ע' ואהע"ז סי' כ"א).
6. If a male supervisor or employer wants to give words of praise or encouragement to a female employee (or vice versa) he may praise the actual work or its quality but must take care not to praise the individual personally.
7. In order to maintain the correct distance between co-workers it is required not to allow too close a relationship to develop between families through family visits or organised trips, etc.

CORRECT ATTIRE

1. It is forbidden for female staff to appear at work in "dressed up" clothing, even if the clothes meet the normal requirements of צניעות (i.e. not to come to work in שבת clothes on a weekday), only to be dressed simply and modestly. Also she should have only a minimum of jewellery and perfume in order not to attract undue attention.
2. A woman must occasionally reassess if over time there has not developed a gradual change in her form of dressing or other conduct. If she notices a decline in צניעות or even that she is becoming more pedantic in her attire then it is a sign that this place of work is unsuitable for her and she would be required to leave her work and seek a more suitable employment because the יצר הרע begins with only small changes and quickly overtakes.

MAINTAINING A DISTANCE

1. As much as possible, handing items from one to another directly should be avoided; instead the item should be placed on a table by one, and then picked up by the other, in order to avoid contact.
2. One should not do a personal favour for the other, e.g. bringing a food item from home (giving a taste from a cake she has baked) or doing the other's shopping for a snack, unless there is a general system of rotation (in which every day someone goes to the shop for the whole staff).
3. Ideally, males and females should work in separate rooms. Where impractical, on no account should they sit at the same table, next to each other or opposite each other, whether during work or not.
4. Male and female workers should not eat (snack or lunch) in the same room without a partition. They should either have separate rooms or different times. It is also forbidden for a female worker to serve food to male workers or vice versa, and certainly it is forbidden for a female secretary to prepare and serve tea or coffee to her supervisor/employer, unless it is her duty to prepare for all the staff together (in which case there is no personal gratification), and even then she should place it at a small distance and not directly in front of him.
5. Tea breaks should be taken separately, and they should also have separate cloakrooms.
6. In every situation during work care must be taken that they do not come in close proximity to each other.

ON ROUTE TO AND FROM WORK

1. A male colleague should not give lifts to female staff (or vice versa) to or from work or anywhere else even for payment and certainly not gratis.
2. Where there is organised transport, separate facilities should be provided and women should minimise speaking to the (male) driver.
3. Where separate transport is not possible, seating must be separate; definitely not on one seat, and preferably men sit in front and women behind, and they should refrain from conversing.
4. A woman should not sit in the front seat near the driver.
5. If they return late at night care should be taken to avoid איסור יחוד.

GATHERINGS

1. At any meetings or conferences arrangements must be made for separate seating.
2. Parties or social gatherings must be made in a way that separates male and female staffs, either by having them take place at different locations or by arranging different times.

GENERAL

1. Before employing a female personal assistant/secretary (for a male employer) one should seek advice from a competent Rov, detailing the necessity of such a move and explaining the working conditions, such as whether she will sit in a separate room and how much and what sort of interaction will be required. In general it is not appropriate for a woman to be the PA of a manager or doctor, etc.
2. It goes without saying that utmost care must be taken to avoid any possibilities of יחוד איסור יחוד. Please note that there are absolutely no dispensations in this matter even in cases of extreme need. Where in doubt a shaalo must be asked. Even where there is no problem of יחוד (e.g. where there are constantly other people entering) it is still not appropriate for a man and woman to be working in a room where there are no other employees there at the same time since this engenders a familiarity. Similarly care should be taken to avoid situations where a male and female arrive early or remain late and thereby are working together alone (again quite apart from issues of יחוד).
3. Obviously one should not attend any family שמחות of colleagues if they are not held with the correct conditions of צניעות.
4. More personal types of functions e.g. birthday parties or small close knit Sheva Brochos, where not all staff are invited, should not be attended by female colleagues even if escorted by her husband where the function is hosted by male colleague, or vice versa. This applies even if the function is completely segregated.
5. If an employee (either male or female) notices that he or she is the object of inappropriate attention from a colleague and the situation cannot be rectified instantly, then guidance must be sought from a competent authority whether it is permissible to remain at this work. Certainly if there is a co-worker who dresses contrary to the דינים of צניעות or uses foul or suggestive speech, then one must leave the employment and trust to הקב"ה for one's livelihood.
6. Owners of shops, offices, warehouses, etc. must ensure that any female workers and cleaners must be dressed in accordance with the dictates of צניעות and should at least insist on an overall. It is also incumbent on management to demand compliance from all staff on all the above instructions. Including these guidelines in the original contract with employees ensures that there will be no problems later in insisting on their compliance. Similarly husbands should inquire and check about the working conditions of their wives.