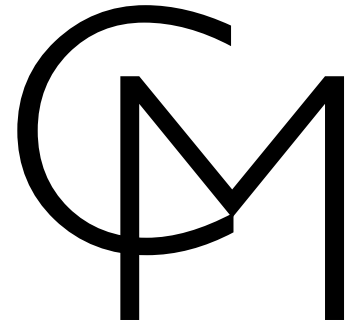


The California Merchant

News for the California Merchant Safety Association



How do we talk to each other now?

Communication is the lifeblood of any organization, and it constantly evolves to meet the needs of a changing world. Does it seem like communication is changing faster than ever? Email, texting, voicemail, virtual meetings—all have their own etiquette and expectations.

Remote work has become a staple of the modern workplace, and it has introduced new communication norms. In 2024, we can expect an even greater emphasis on asynchronous communication. With team members spread across different time zones, asynchronous communication, including emails, project management tools, and instant messaging, will take precedence over traditional synchronous methods like in-person meetings.

Video conferencing, while not new, will continue to be a primary mode of communication for remote and hybrid teams. To maintain engagement and connection, organizations will need to invest in high-quality video conferencing platforms and encourage the use of video during virtual meetings.

The rise of the hybrid workplace

The concept of the hybrid workplace is no longer just a trend; it's a new norm. In 2023, we will see a seamless integration of in-person and remote work, which requires a balance of synchronous and asynchronous communication. Managers will need to be skilled in leading diverse teams, ensuring that remote and in-office employees feel equally connected and included.



Digital etiquette and respect

With the increasing reliance on digital communication, practicing good digital etiquette is crucial. In 2023, we'll see a growing emphasis on respect in virtual interactions. This includes punctuality for online meetings, mindful use of email and messaging platforms, and respecting colleagues' boundaries when they're off the clock.

Inclusive communication

Diversity and inclusion have been at the forefront of many organizations' agendas, and 2023 is no exception. Inclusive communication will continue to evolve, ensuring that everyone's voice is heard and valued. This involves avoiding jargon, using inclusive language, and making an effort to actively listen and engage with colleagues from diverse backgrounds.

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Continuous learning and adaptation

As communication technology advances rapidly, staying up to date is essential. Employees and organizations will need to embrace a culture of continuous learning and adaptation. In 2024, we can expect more training and development programs focused on improving digital communication skills, managing remote teams, and understanding the nuances of cross-cultural communication.

Cybersecurity awareness

In an increasingly digital world, the importance of cybersecurity cannot be overstated. Companies should place a strong emphasis on cybersecurity

awareness. Employees will be expected to follow best practices to protect sensitive data and information.

Embracing automation and AI

Artificial intelligence (AI) and automation will play a significant role in communication as we move into the second half of the decade. Chatbots and virtual assistants will become more sophisticated, aiding in customer service and internal communication. Organizations will need to strike a balance between human and automated communication to enhance efficiency while maintaining a personal touch.

Sustainability in communication

Environmental concerns are becoming more prominent, and sustainable communication will gain

traction in upcoming years. Organizations will focus on reducing their carbon footprint through virtual meetings, remote work, and eco-friendly communication tools.

The world of communication is dynamic and quickly changing. As the workplace continues to evolve, so do expectations for effective and respectful communication. Embracing these new communication norms is essential for organizations and individuals to thrive in the modern professional landscape. By staying adaptable, fostering inclusivity, and harnessing the power of technology, we can navigate the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead as we stay connected to one another... because the purpose of communication, let's remember, is talking to each other.

Texting at work: Navigating the digital frontier

In our fast-paced and ever-connected world, the line between personal and professional communication is becoming increasingly blurred. Texting, once predominantly a tool for social interaction, has made its way into the workplace, offering a quick and efficient means of exchanging information. While texting can be a valuable tool for business communication, it's essential to maintain a sense of professionalism and etiquette. Here's a closer look at the dos and don'ts of texting in the workplace.

Choose Your Recipients Wisely

One of the first considerations in workplace texting is choosing the right recipients. Texting is often best suited for quick updates, urgent matters, or informal discussions. Ensure that the person you are texting is comfortable with this mode

of communication, and consider the urgency and privacy of the message. Avoid texting superiors or clients on sensitive matters if it's not the norm in your organization.

Mind Your Timing

In the workplace, timing is everything. Be mindful of when you send texts to colleagues, supervisors, or subordinates. Texting during non-working hours or on weekends should generally be avoided unless there's an established understanding or a pressing matter. The time-sensitive nature of your message should guide your choice between a text and an email.

Concise and Clear Messages

Texting is known for its brevity, but clarity should

never be sacrificed for conciseness. Craft your messages with care, ensuring they are easy to understand. Avoid abbreviations, slang, or excessive emojis unless it aligns with your workplace culture. Remember that misunderstandings can arise from rushed or cryptic texts.

Respect the Chain of Command

Texting should respect the hierarchy in the workplace. Texting your manager or team leader without a valid reason, especially during non-working hours, may be seen as intrusive. Maintain professional boundaries and escalate issues through the appropriate channels. If there's a shared understanding that texting is acceptable between all levels of employees, proceed with caution and respect.

Double-Check Before Sending

Auto-correct fails, typos, and unintended autocorrect suggestions can lead to embarrassing and even costly misunderstandings. Always double-check your texts before hitting "send." This extra moment of review can prevent potentially serious communication mishaps.

Sensitive or Confidential Matters: Choose Alternatives

While texting is efficient for many purposes, it is not the best medium for sensitive or confidential information. When dealing with confidential matters, adhere to company policies regarding secure communication methods. Conversations about HR issues, financial data, or proprietary information should be conducted through more secure channels.

What to do when an employee is chronically ill

In today's workplace, managers are increasingly faced with the responsibility of supporting employees with various health conditions, including chronic illnesses. Managing a chronically ill employee requires empathy, understanding, and flexibility to ensure that the individual can thrive in their role while maintaining their health and well-being.

Open and Compassionate Communication

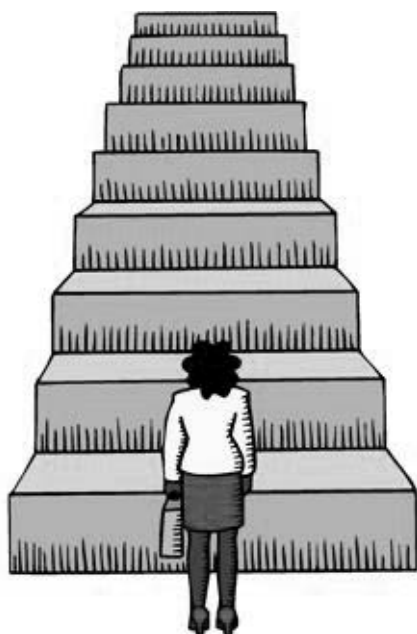
The foundation for successfully managing a chronically ill employee is open and compassionate communication. Begin by having a private, one-on-one conversation with the employee to discuss their condition, its impact on their work, and any accommodations or support they may need. Encourage the employee to share their experiences, concerns, and limitations. This dialogue will help you gain a deeper understanding of their situation and build trust.

Understand the Employee's Condition

It's essential to educate yourself about the specific chronic illness your employee is dealing with. This understanding will allow you to be more supportive and accommodating. Learn about the nature of the condition, its symptoms, and potential flare-ups, as well as common treatments and therapies. Knowing how the condition may affect the employee's ability to work is crucial for effective management.

Collaboratively Develop an Accommodation Plan

Work with the employee to create an accommodation plan that addresses their unique needs. This plan should be flexible and tailored to the individual's condition and job responsibilities. Consider factors such as flexible working hours, telecommuting options, ergonomic adjustments, or additional breaks when necessary. Ensure that the plan complies with relevant laws and company policies regarding disability accommodations.



colleagues to offer assistance and be considerate of the employee's needs.

Monitor and Adjust as Needed

Regularly check in with the employee to assess their well-being and the effectiveness of the accommodation plan. Be prepared to make adjustments if necessary. Chronic illnesses can be unpredictable, and the employee's needs may change over time.

Stay Informed About Legal Obligations

Familiarize yourself with applicable employment laws, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in the United States, to ensure that you are meeting legal requirements. Compliance with these laws is not only ethical but also protects both the employee and the organization.

Document Everything

Maintain detailed records of all communication and accommodations made for the chronically ill employee. This documentation will be invaluable in the event of any disputes or legal issues.

Seek External Resources

If you are unsure about the best way to manage a chronically ill employee, consider seeking advice from HR professionals, legal counsel, or disability support organizations. They can provide guidance and ensure that you are following best practices.

Managing a chronically ill employee is a delicate and important responsibility for any manager. By approaching the situation with empathy, open communication, and flexibility, you can create a supportive and inclusive work environment that benefits not only the affected employee but the entire team. Remember that a well-managed chronically ill employee can contribute positively to the organization while maintaining their health and well-being.

Maintain Privacy and Confidentiality

Respect the employee's right to privacy and maintain confidentiality regarding their health condition. Do not disclose sensitive information to other employees without the individual's explicit consent. This confidentiality fosters a supportive work environment and prevents discrimination or stigmatization.

Promote a Healthy Work-Life Balance

Encourage the chronically ill employee to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Some employees may push themselves too hard, fearing they will be perceived as less productive due to their condition. Make sure they understand that their health is a priority and that you value their well-being. Offer flexibility in work hours or deadlines when needed.

Foster a Supportive Work Environment

Promote a culture of inclusivity and support within your team and organization. Educate your team about chronic illnesses and the importance of empathy and understanding. Encourage

How's your financial health in this climate?

High interest rates can pose significant challenges for individuals and businesses alike. Whether it's on loans, credit cards, or mortgages, the cost of borrowing money can become a financial burden. Managing finances under such circumstances requires a strategic approach to keep your financial stability intact.

Before delving into strategies for managing finances under high interest rates, it's important to grasp why interest rates can soar. High interest rates can result from various factors, including changes in economic conditions, inflation, central bank policies, and lenders' assessments of risk. When interest rates are elevated, it means that the cost of borrowing money is more expensive, which can impact a range of financial activities.



unnecessary expenses can free up money to allocate toward debt repayment. Avoiding additional debt and practicing responsible spending are crucial during periods of high interest rates.

Effective Strategies for Managing Finances

1. Review and Prioritize Debt: The first step in managing high interest rates is to assess your current debt. Make a list of all outstanding loans, credit card balances, and any other financial obligations. Prioritize paying down high-interest debts first, as these have the most substantial impact on your finances.

2. Refinance High-Interest Loans: If feasible, consider refinancing high-interest loans at a lower rate. Refinancing can help reduce your monthly payments and the total interest paid over the life of the loan. Mortgage refinancing, in particular, can lead to significant savings when interest rates are lower.

3. Budget Wisely: Establish a detailed budget that tracks your income, expenses, and savings goals. Cutting

4. Build an Emergency Fund: High interest rates can lead to increased financial instability, making it essential to have an emergency fund in place. An emergency fund can cover unexpected expenses, preventing you from resorting to high-interest credit cards or loans.

5. Negotiate with Creditors: Reach out to your creditors and explore the possibility of negotiating for lower interest rates or more favorable repayment terms. In some cases, creditors may be willing to work with you to avoid defaults.

6. Consider Debt Consolidation: Debt consolidation involves taking out a single loan to pay off multiple debts. This can simplify your debt repayment and potentially lower your overall interest rate, but it's essential to carefully evaluate the terms of the consolidation loan.

7. Explore Balance Transfer Credit Cards: If you have high-interest credit card debt, consider transferring your balances to a card with a lower or 0% introductory APR. However, be mindful of balance transfer fees and the duration of the promotional rate.

8. Diversify Your Investments: High interest rates can impact investment returns. Diversify your investment portfolio to mitigate potential losses and maintain a balanced approach to risk.

9. Seek Professional Advice: Consulting with a financial advisor can provide you with tailored guidance on managing finances during high-interest rate periods. They can help you develop a personalized financial strategy that aligns with your goals and risk tolerance.

10. Explore Alternative Financing Options: In some cases, alternative financing options such as peer-to-peer lending or community development financial institutions (CDFIs) may offer more competitive interest rates than traditional banks.

11. Continue to Save for the Future: Even in the face of high interest rates, it's important to continue saving for your long-term financial goals, such as retirement or education. Consistent saving can provide a sense of financial security, regardless of the interest rate environment.

Managing finances under high interest rates requires diligence, strategic planning, and adaptability. By assessing your debt, making informed decisions, and seeking financial advice when necessary, you can navigate periods of elevated interest rates while working toward your financial goals. Remember that the financial landscape is ever-changing, and the key to successful financial management is to remain flexible and proactive in adapting to the current economic conditions.

Sciatica: A common ailment explained

Sciatica is a prevalent and often painful condition affecting millions of individuals worldwide. It originates from issues within the sciatic nerve, causing discomfort, pain, and potential limitations in mobility.

Sciatica refers to a set of symptoms resulting from the compression, irritation, or inflammation of the sciatic nerve. The sciatic nerve is the longest nerve in the human body, running from the lower back, through the buttocks, and down each leg. When it becomes affected, it can lead to pain, tingling, and numbness along its path.

Sciatica typically presents with the following symptoms:

1. **Lower Back Pain:** Sciatica often originates in the lower back and radiates down one leg or, in some cases, both legs. The pain can range from mild to severe and is often described as a burning or shooting sensation.

2. **Leg Pain:** The pain can extend from the buttocks down to the thigh, calf, and even the foot. It may vary in intensity and be constant or intermittent.

3. **Numbness and Tingling:** Individuals with sciatica may experience a tingling or numbness in the affected leg, making it feel weak or "asleep."

4. **Muscle Weakness:** In some cases, sciatica can lead to muscle weakness in the affected leg, which can result in difficulty walking or maintaining balance.

5. **Aggravation with Movement:** Certain movements, such as coughing, sneezing, or sitting for extended periods, can exacerbate the pain. It may also be more pronounced during the night.

6. **Bowel and Bladder Issues:** In rare cases, severe sciatica can lead to bladder or bowel dysfunction, requiring immediate medical attention.

Diagnosing sciatica typically involves a thorough medical evaluation. Healthcare professionals may take a detailed medical history. Your doctor will inquire about your symptoms, pain



intensity, and medical history, as well as any recent injuries or physical activities that might be contributing to the condition.

A physical examination will help your doctor identify signs of nerve compression, such as muscle weakness, loss of reflexes, or sensory changes.

X-rays, MRI scans, and CT scans can provide detailed images of the spine and help identify the root cause of sciatica, such as a herniated disc, spinal stenosis, or bone spurs.

The treatment for sciatica varies depending on the severity and underlying cause of the condition. Common approaches include:

1. **Medication:** Over-the-counter pain relievers or prescription medications, including non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) or muscle relaxants, can help manage pain and inflammation.

2. **Physical Therapy:** Physical therapy can aid in strengthening and stretching exercises to improve posture, reduce pressure on the sciatic nerve, and enhance mobility.

3. **Heat and Cold Therapy:** Applying heat or cold packs to the affected area can provide relief from pain and reduce inflammation.

4. **Epidural Steroid Injections:** In severe cases, healthcare providers may recommend epidural steroid injections to deliver anti-inflammatory medication directly to the affected nerve root.

5. **Surgery:** Surgical intervention may be necessary when conservative treatments fail to provide relief. Procedures like discectomy or laminectomy can alleviate pressure on the sciatic nerve.

6. **Alternative Therapies:** Some individuals find relief through alternative treatments like acupuncture, chiropractic care, or osteopathy.

7. **Lifestyle Adjustments:** Maintaining a healthy weight, practicing good posture, and engaging in regular exercise can help prevent and alleviate sciatica.

It's important to note that the appropriate treatment plan for sciatica should be determined by a healthcare professional after a thorough evaluation. While most cases of sciatica can be managed with non-invasive methods, prompt medical attention is crucial, as untreated or severe sciatica can lead to complications and long-term issues. Ultimately, early diagnosis and targeted treatment are essential to alleviate pain and improve the quality of life for individuals dealing with sciatica.

Sciatica help for workers with physical jobs

Dealing with sciatica while working on your feet can be challenging, as standing and walking for extended periods can exacerbate the pain. However, with the right strategies and accommodations, you can manage sciatica and minimize its impact on your work. Here are some tips to help you cope with sciatica when you work on your feet:



1. Consult a Healthcare Professional: If you haven't already, consult a healthcare professional to diagnose and assess the severity of your sciatica. They can provide guidance on treatment options and offer recommendations tailored to your specific condition.

2. Wear Supportive Footwear: Invest in high-quality, supportive shoes designed for your specific needs. Look for shoes with good arch support, cushioning, and shock absorption to reduce the impact on your lower back and legs. Insoles or orthotic inserts can also provide added comfort and support.

3. Proper Standing Posture: Pay attention to your posture while standing. Keep your weight evenly distributed on both feet and avoid locking your knees. Consider using a footrest or anti-fatigue mat if your job allows it to reduce the strain on your lower back.

4. Frequent Short Breaks: Whenever possible, take short breaks to sit down and rest. Changing positions and relieving pressure on your lower back can help reduce pain. Try to find a balance between standing and sitting throughout the day.

5. Stretching Exercises: Incorporate

stretching exercises into your daily routine. Stretching can help alleviate muscle tension and relieve pressure on the sciatic nerve. Focus on stretches for the lower back, hamstrings, and glutes.

6. Anti-Inflammatory Medications: Over-the-counter anti-inflammatory medications, such as ibuprofen, can help reduce inflammation and alleviate pain. Consult with a healthcare professional before using any medication to ensure it's safe and suitable for your condition.

7. Heat and Cold Therapy: Apply heat or cold packs to the affected area during breaks to help relax muscles and reduce inflammation. Experiment with both methods to see which one provides more relief.

8. Maintain a Healthy Weight: Excess body weight can exacerbate sciatica symptoms, as it places additional stress on the lower back. Consider adopting a healthy diet and exercise plan to maintain or achieve a healthy weight.

9. Supportive Braces: In some cases, a

lumbar support or brace can help stabilize the lower back and reduce pressure on the sciatic nerve. Consult with a healthcare professional to determine if this is a suitable option for you.

10. Communication with Your Employer: If your job requires prolonged standing and walking, discuss your condition with your employer. They may be able to make accommodations, such as providing a stool for brief sitting intervals or adjusting your work schedule to include more breaks.

11. Physical Therapy: Consider seeking physical therapy, which can provide tailored exercises and techniques to address your specific sciatica symptoms and improve your overall mobility.

12. Mindful Lifting: If your job involves lifting heavy objects, be extra cautious and practice proper lifting techniques to minimize strain on your lower back.

13. Reduce Stress: Stress can exacerbate pain, so employ stress-reduction techniques like deep breathing, meditation, or mindfulness exercises to help manage your sciatica symptoms.

Managing sciatica while working on your feet may require patience and a multi-faceted approach. Everyone's condition is unique, so it's crucial to work closely with healthcare professionals to create a personalized plan for your situation. Additionally, staying consistent with your self-care and treatment regimen is key to effectively managing sciatica and maintaining your productivity at work.

SAFETY ... IT PAYS



The ins and outs of portable stepladder safety

Many of the most common accidents that occur when we use a portable step ladder can be avoided by observing the following tips:

DO's ...

Always inspect your portable step ladder before use, and take it out of service if there is any deficiency found that affects its safe use.

Make sure all four feet of the portable step ladder are set on a level and stable surface, and that both ladder spreaders are fully extended and locked into place before use.

Keep your ladder, your body, your tools and any materials at least 10 feet away from energized electrical conductors (or even further for higher voltages exceeding 50kv).



Always make sure at least one of your hands is firmly grasping a rung or side rail when you are climbing up or down a ladder. And be aware that just sliding your hand along a side rail as you ascend or descend the ladder does NOT constitute "grasping" the ladder.

Maintain your balance and center of gravity on your portable step ladder by keeping your belt-buckle between the two side rails. Reposition the ladder instead of over-reaching.

DONT's ...

Never use a portable step ladder for purposes for which it was not designed. For example, do not lean a closed portable step ladder against a wall or other surface for the purpose of climbing, or stand on one that has been placed across objects in a horizontal position.

Do not use a portable step ladder made of metal or any other conductive materials when performing any task or working in an area where you, your tools or materials, or the ladder could make contact with energized electrical conductors or equipment.

Never climb up or down a portable step ladder while carrying any object that prevents you from firmly grasping the ladder with at least one hand - or that could cause you to lose your balance.

Do not place any tools or materials on the top cap or any step of your ladder that might fall and strike someone if the ladder were to be bumped or inadvertently moved.

Never stand on the top cap of a regular portable step ladder, or on the top step. Always follow the ladder manufacturer's rules and warning stickers for proper standing surfaces.

While these are not the only precautions and prohibitions applicable to the use of a portable step ladder, heeding these simple tips can go a long ways towards protecting all of us who do use them from accidents, injuries, and even death.

OSHA CORNER

Please visit the following address on the web to download helpful safety posters, guides and pamphlets for a safer workplace.

<https://www.osha.gov/publications>



Text: Maintain a professional tone in messages

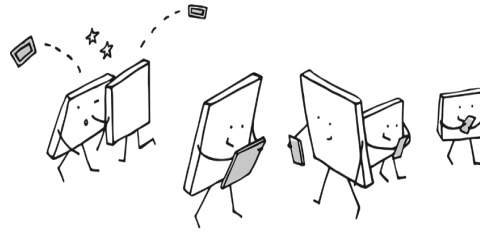
Continued from page 2

Acknowledge Receipt and Respond Promptly

When you receive a work-related text, acknowledge its receipt and respond promptly, especially if the sender is waiting for your input. This helps to maintain a sense of professionalism and efficiency. Ignoring work-related texts can be perceived as unprofessional or disengaged.

Use Group Texts Judiciously

Group texting can be a convenient way to communicate with a team, but it



can also lead to message overload and distractions. Use group texts judiciously, and be respectful of your colleagues' time and attention. If the conversation veers off-topic, consider moving it to another platform.

Maintain a Professional Tone

Last but not least, it's crucial to maintain a professional tone in your workplace texts. Avoid sarcasm, humor, or personal anecdotes that might be inappropriate in a professional context. Remember that texts are a form of written communication and can leave a lasting impression.

Texting is a valuable tool for workplace communication, but it must be used with discretion and professionalism. Adhering to these etiquette guidelines can help you navigate the digital frontier while maintaining a respectful and efficient communication style in the modern workplace.

Choose work shoes carefully to avoid slips and falls

Slips can sneak up on you when you least expect it, sometimes resulting in a nasty bruise or broken bones suffered in a fall, or even non-fall related injuries such as a twisted knee or wrenched back. And one commonly overlooked cause of slips at work is the improper selection, use, and care of footwear. However, OSHA safety regulations do not have a lot to say about the proper selection and use of footwear when it comes to preventing slips in the workplace, other than requiring appropriate waterproof footwear where wet processes are used. So, here are a few accident prevention tips related to the selection, use, and care of work shoes and boots:



- Make sure your footwear has suitable soles designed for the type of surface and conditions you walk on at work. For example, rubber soles are more slip resistant than are leather soles, and soles with a gripped surface are more slip resistant than are soles that are flat and smooth.

- Check the soles of your shoes and boots to make sure they have not become worn out. Even the best slip-resistant soles available will

wear down over time, resulting in less traction and slip-resistance over time.

- Also inspect your shoes and boots for any build-up of mud or any other foreign matter on the soles, and clean them when necessary. When materials are allowed to build up on the surface of your soles, they can cause you to slip, or at the least lessen the slip resistance that your soles afford you when they are clean.

- Loose soles on your shoes or boots can also be a safety hazard. This condition occurs when the stitching that holds the sole to your shoe or boot becomes loose or breaks. As a result, you may put your foot down to stop, but your foot continues to move a little because the sole and body of the shoe

slightly separate, and that can cause you to slip.

- Last but not least, always consider the adequacy of your regular shoes or boots when you perform any non-routine task where you might be exposed to a different type of floor surface, or where there are different types of materials present on the floor. You could even include these considerations if and when you perform a Job Safety Analysis, or JSA, for the tasks you will be performing each day.

As you can see, something we often take for granted, like the selection and condition of our work shoes and boots, plays a small but important role in preventing injuries associated with slips and resulting falls.

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