

'Coffice' etiquette: How to behave when working from a cafe

Tips for surviving and thriving on the job.

WORKPLACE TOPICS

Jeff Howell spent four years working as a barista and has observed plenty of strange things. "I've seen people literally set up a mobile office and park for six hours," says Howell, now director of operations at Caffe Ladro's 14 Seattle-area locations.

Most of us know not to go that far, but we might still have questions about possible work-at-café faux pas. Here are some tips on coffee 'n' office — or "coffice" — etiquette.

Share space

"If it's a teeny place with limited seating, you're doing the business a disservice by hogging a table all day," says Tory Johnson, the author of "Will Work from Home," a book about telecommuting.

Returning the favor

If you've found a great spot to work for an hour or two, share on social media how much you value the space, and post a positive Yelp review, Tory Johnson suggests.

"Don't be tone-deaf," she says. "Look around to see if people are waiting for tables and adjust your time accordingly." If it's a larger café, you can warm that bench seat a little longer, although you should take the minimum of space available (a two-person table instead of a communal one).

Aim for two hours

"Accounting is solitary work, so I like having some people around," says Sarah Edwards, 37, who often cracks open her laptop in cafés. To the buzz of coffee machines and background conversation, she crunches numbers, but moves every two hours to hot spots such as Ballard's Miro Tea and Fremont's Caffe Ladro and Caffé Vita.

Buy something

Howell suggests buying something about once an hour. If a barista comes by to ask whether you need anything, he or she might be offering a subtle hint that it's time to scope out a new scone or move along, Howell says.

Charge your laptop beforehand

There might be enough outlets for everyone — or you might get a seat in the digital no-man's land. Howell suggests making sure your laptop is well-fueled before you walk in the door, just in case.

Kill calls while ordering

"From the barista's perspective, it feels rude," Howell says. "We make a point to coach baristas to be friendly and ask how you're doing." It's OK to make a café call if you're speaking at normal volume and not disturbing the people around you. However, videoconferencing is distracting, Edwards says.

Meet properly

Ideally, for a meeting, "everybody buys something," Howell says, and avoids bringing in outside food or drink. It's not cool to walk into a coffee shop with a Starbucks cup unless you're at Starbucks.

While casual meetings are fine, Edwards doesn't like inadvertently eavesdropping on job interviews. Coffee-shop patrons are often privy to that somewhat-awkward first dance between employer and potential employee — a dance

that sometimes reveals personal details.

Mind your multimedia

Bring headphones, as not everyone finds that Nyan Cat video to be an appropriate café soundtrack. And wait on the NSFW (not safe for work) videos and photos you wouldn't show your grandma. "It's got to be a family-friendly atmosphere," Howell says.

Consider fellow café-goers whenever multimedia is involved. "Students come in and are learning German with repetitive statements over and over again," Edwards says. "It's not the place for that."

Stay with your stuff

Don't ask the staff to keep an eye on your laptop. Pack up, even if you have to go to the bathroom. Shop employees can't watch your belongings, Howell says, as they may become busy serving customers.

Remember: It's not home

Although most cafés strive to help customers feel at home, it's not quite the same. Other patrons won't appreciate your wadded-up napkins all over the floor or your bare feet on the table.

If you must remove your shoes or violate any other tenet of the coffee code, you can always stay home and run the ambient café-noise app [Coffitivity](#), which mixes background conversation and the hiss of the espresso machine.