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## Contractor Survival Guide - by Casey Gillespie

### Enjoying Life As An Independent



Okay, so who doesn't enjoy sleeping in a little and then emailing your clients in your pajamas, cup of coffee in hand? Negotiating contracts while vacationing in the Islands hasn't really been a let down either. But how are you doing in the workplace? You have been loving life as an Independent; however, when you begin a new project where you are the outsider you must follow certain rules to ensure you are not only making the best impression, but also to guarantee your longevity in the workplace.

As an Independent contractor working on a project with a contract that can be ended by either party at any given time you must consider a whole new set of rules you probably were not aware of as an employee. They aren't completely difficult rules, but they are non-negotiable if you are dedicated to what you do-and why would you be an IP if you weren't? That's what I thought...keep reading.

### Thou Shalt Make No Enemies



It's simple: everyone must like you and respect your work. It's your job to make nice and see to it that other office managers and employees approve of you. I am not saying go out and make new best friends (in fact just the opposite-more on that later), just be professional and amiable on that level. If you are anything like I used to be, then you must learn to think outside of your immediate circle. Where do you think new projects come from? Hint: Other departments in the same company may require your skills and if you made a good impression who do you think they will call first? Those are pretty easy marketing tactics if you ask me.

I have found that in companies these days the traditional hierarchical structure isn't what runs the business. People who have the talent and

the influence in the company run it. Find out who those people are and get on their good side. When a contractor's extension is on the line, jealousies and negative feelings have an ugly way of surfacing and may work against you. As unfair as that may be, all of those feelings may be aired by co-workers behind closed doors and you may never have a chance to defend yourself. So, my advice to you is to play nice with the other kids and that's one less thing you will have to worry about.

### **In Case You Were Wondering-Appearances Do Count**



The cold hard fact is that more often than not contractors are held to different standards than their wage-slave counterparts. This applies to everything from water cooler gossip to taking long lunches. Keep in mind that even a valid reason for a shortfall may be reason enough for the client to end the contract. In the long run that will hurt your reputation so stick to this die-hard rule: mind your Ps and Qs on the jobsite. Work every hour while on the worksite (even if unpaid) and don't take part in office politics. Often contractual terms are negated when social opinion is the matter on the table. Ugly, I know.

### **Putting Your Emotions Aside**



For most of our adult lives we have been making ourselves more emotionally available. Great, fantastic-save it for your spouse or shrink, the workplace wants nothing to do with your emotional epiphanies. Prudent is a generous word, but be prudent with whom (if anyone) you confide in. Think of it as simply the division of church and state. Clients do not extend contracts to consultants to provide best friends, drinking buddies, lovers or extra-martial affairs. Please remember that these personal agendas will complicate your survival in a workplace.

Also, airing your heart-felt thoughts and beliefs on religious and/or political matters will most definitely work against. Don't shoot yourself in the foot-keep those opinions to yourself and if asked to participate in a potentially detrimental conversation politely decline. The last thing you need is to be labeled as "controversial" or as a "know-it-all." Leave that to me, I'm the writer (wink, nudge.)

So until next week cohorts, I admit I don't know everything, but I do know that you should take my advice on this-trust me, you will thank me for it.

### **Casey Gillespie**

"If all mankind minus one were of one opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind "

~John Stuart Mill, On Liberty, 1859

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