

I Hope This Email Finds You Never

The Official Guide to Blissfully Surviving the Modern Workplace

by **Ken Kupchik**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Congratulations! You've been hired at your dream a job. Given how competitive it is in today's world, that's quite an accomplishment. It takes countless hours to search through job postings, go through multiple rounds of video interviews, and to click that "I'm not a robot" thing on the employer's website. Exhausting! Now that you've put that stress behind you, it's time to move onto new stress. Luckily, you won't have to wait long, because there's nothing quite as nerve-racking as the modern workplace.

Unlike most workplace books, however, *I Hope This Email Finds You Never: The Official Guide to Blissfully Surviving the Modern Workplace*, this one won't sugarcoat, deflect, or mislead. Author Ken Kupchik won't bore you with some business titan's life story, and he won't try to convince you that if you just follow a trendy new self-improvement fad, you'll be promoted to CEO. This book puts aside the motivational screeds, productivity hacks, and pop-science, and focuses instead on things in the workplace that truly cause us grief in a lighthearted, entertaining, and (most importantly) cynical way.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to have good general workplace etiquette
- Six tips for getting into a remote-work routine
- How to avoid new work assignments during meetings
- Five signs it's time to move on and find a new job

Part 1: Employee Orientation

Starting a new job can be overwhelming. There are people to meet, information to digest, and lots of preparation required to counter the lies you told on your resume. Whether you're an experienced employee or new to the workforce, you can be sure that at some point in your first few days, you'll start to wonder whether you've made a grave mistake (you have). The good news is that your new employer has invested time and resources into a comprehensive indoctrination process known as "new-hire orientation."

Better than Ambien: Employee Training

Your training period is a great time to soak up knowledge, better understand workplace dynamics, and scroll through Instagram so you can see all the people who are having fun because their parents are rich. It's important to take notes and pay attention, especially when people are discussing what to order for lunch.

Employee training provides new hires with requisite skills and knowledge required to carry out the functions of their job. Whether the skills being taught are broad or specific to a particular role, they will be presented in the most boring, depressing, and unpleasant way possible. If you find it dull and boring, don't worry, the job itself will be dull and boring too.

Part 2: General Workplace Etiquette

Once you've settled into your new routine and milked being new for all it's worth, you'll want to adopt the unwritten rules of the workplace. Oftentimes, these rules will be observable without actually being documented, not unlike the rules of a prison gang.

Manners, Greetings, Salutations, and Conversations Pre Approved by HR

Having good manners can help you excel in the workplace, unless you want to become a senior manager or an executive, in which case the exact opposite is true.

A good rule of thumb is to treat others the way you want to be treated. No matter who you're addressing, whether it's the janitor or the CEO, you should always lead with respect. In the workplace, *what* you say is just as important as *how* you say it.

Here are a couple of examples:

Acceptable: "Thanks for taking the time to go over this."

Not Acceptable: "I appreciate you graciously setting aside a few precious minutes for me, Your Highness."

Acceptable: "Do you need any help on this?"

Not Acceptable: "I will literally pay you to stop emailing me."

It might be tempting to behave the same way around your coworkers as you do around your friends, but the difference is that your friends (probably) aren't getting paid to spend time with you. This is why having good manners and following the unspoken rules of workplace etiquette are so important—being around you is already difficult enough.

The Rules of the Kitchen: Stealing Someone's Yogurt is Literally a Crime

There is, perhaps, no other place where proper etiquette is as important as the kitchen or break room. Unlike the bathroom, we don't have individual feeding stalls, so respecting people's boundaries and adhering to unspoken rules of the kitchen is tantamount to a smooth workplace experience.

When people are hungry, they turn into rabid animals, which makes it that much more important to be considerate when secretly eating someone else's food. Whether you brought your own lunch from home or spent thirty dollars on a greasy sub, make sure you follow the rules of the kitchen.

Navigating Social Events

Social events are a common occurrence in the modern workplace and they can be a great way to blow off steam and get to know the people you work with in a more informal setting. But they can also carry risks, as the loose, permissive nature of social events can bring out the person you swore you left behind in college.

Though a work-related gathering might feel more social than professional, it's important to be on your best behavior, because what happens outside of work won't stay outside of work for long. A good rule of thumb is if you wouldn't do it at the workplace, then you shouldn't do it at a social event, which probably rules out having a good time.

Part 3: Coworkers

The modern workplace is *filled* with coworkers, who now have direct unfettered access to you at all hours of the day thanks to the magic of smartphones and direct messaging. This is why your relationship with your coworkers is so important. Play your cards right, and your coworkers will

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have your back. But make a mistake, and you'll have to look over your shoulder, as your workmates will be angling to take you down.

Building relationships in the workplace is never easy—there are so many variables that come into play. A coworker's seniority, their trustworthiness, and their compensation as it relates to yours all must be factored in.

Workplace friendship is a journey, not a destination. If you don't make a connection right away, don't fret, since it usually takes time for people to warm up to their new colleagues.

Boundaries

The relationships you develop at work can be impactful, but there are many ways in which they will differ from relationships in your personal life. It's important to set and follow boundaries, lest you find yourself stuck in an unpleasant situation from which you can't escape.

Boundaries can help protect us from being exploited, but they can also help put distance between ourselves and our less trustworthy coworkers. These are the types of people who have no qualms about throwing us under the bus if it suits their ends. Given the opportunity, they'll ruin our jobs and our lives, and won't lose a wink of sleep.

Plan to keep your coworkers at arm's length if you want to avoid ending up in an uncomfortable situation. And the best way to do that is by establishing clear boundaries. Boundaries can be used as signals to make it look like you're a hardworking professional, focused on tasks and responsibilities. And, as we all know, appearances are everything.

Part 4: Working Remotely (Wink, Wink)

Recent advances in technology have given us many new experiences, such as the feeling of anxiety at nearly every waking moment, twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year. These same advances have allowed tens of millions of employees to perform their job duties from home, bringing the workplace to our bedrooms and home offices.

For many, remote work has been a godsend but for others, the prolonged isolation has caused undue distress, and the lack of structure has made it difficult to be productive, which sounds believable enough to garner sympathy if you ever need an excuse for why you haven't done any work.

You can work remotely without losing your job, your mind, or your laptop. In the end, you might realize the benefits of remote work far outweigh the burdens of the office, or you might just be looking for an excuse to get away from your spouse. Either way, read on.

Getting Out of Your Bed and Into a Routine

One of the more difficult challenges those new to remote work must face is the question of how to structure their day. Getting into a routine starts with forming good habits. Since you're obviously not going to do that, the next best option is to trick yourself into doing just enough to avoid putting your job in jeopardy.

While everybody's approach to remote work will be different, the following tips can help you add some structure to your day and avoid the pitfalls of nearly unlimited freedom.

Tip #1: Use the morning hours wisely.

Productivity experts recommend you wake up the same time you normally would if you were going into the office, but this book recommends that you wake up literally thirty seconds before your manager starts checking to see if you're online.

Tip #2: Create a dedicated workspace.

This allows you to separate your professional life from your personal, so whenever you're in your workstation, you can focus exclusively on work and not on the fact that your personal life is in shambles.

Tip #3: Minimize distractions.

Limit distractions by getting household chores done before sitting down to work, or after you've finished for the evening, and ask the people you live with to be mindful of the fact that even though you're at home, you're technically still at work.

Tip #4: Maintain a consistent schedule.

Starting and stopping work at the same time everyday ensures consistency and creates a healthy balance between your personal and professional lives, both of which involve sitting on the couch for hours and vacantly staring at a screen.

Tip #5: Take breaks throughout the day.

Taking breaks at home becomes complicated since there's not much separation between you and your couch, your kitchen, and the counterfeit designer purse rink you're running out of your spare bedroom. Make sure to schedule breaks throughout the day, or you risk unnecessary burnout.

Tip #6: Make sure to leave the house.

Since you no longer have to go into an office, you might find that you're spending an inordinate amount of time at home. Whether it's going out for a walk, working at the local coffee shop, or flying out to Vegas to audition for an experiential circus troupe, you need to avoid letting yourself get cooped up at home.

Like anything else, remote work has its upsides and downsides. While some people might thrive on being locked in their bedroom all day, others will long for the camaraderie and structure found in an office. And no matter which side of the spectrum you're on, you can rest assured that your opinion is probably wrong.

Part 5: Meetings

Love them or hate them, meetings happen in every workplace, and every type of employee, no matter how junior, will be forced, at some point, to attend one. Some meetings will be short, and some will feel like they're never going to end; some will be enjoyable, and some will feel like a police interrogation.

But whether the meeting is a productive one or not, you can always be sure that there's no way you'll ever walk out of a meeting and say, "Man, I'd really like to do *that* again."

Excuses to Get Out of Meetings While Making People Feel Bad for You

If you've ever wished you could snap your fingers and make every meeting on your calendar disappear, you're not alone. Impending meetings have led to many sleepless nights, not to mention a myriad of creative excuses to get out of attending.

If you're looking for a good (and believable) excuse, try

using one of the following:

- "I'm sorry, but I'm not feeling well and can't make it to the meeting."
- "You'll have to excuse my absence, since I will be praying for your forgiveness during that time."
- "Unfortunately, I can't make it due to a conflict. The conflict is between the meeting and my desire not to go."

In life, we are often forced to do things we don't want to do. And at work, we're *always* forced to do things we don't want to do. Meetings are at the top of that list, which is why having a strategy to get out of them is so important.

Punting the Ball: How to Minimize the Chances of Getting More Work Assigned to You During a Meeting

The biggest risk of attending a meeting isn't losing precious work hours or being outed as a fraud; it's walking away from the meeting with more work. You need to go into every meeting with a plan for how to avoid, or at least mitigate, additional assignments.

Without a concrete plan, you risk leaving the size of your workload to chance, and hope, as they say, is never a strategy, especially in the workplace where all hope goes to die.

Here are some tips:

- Constantly talk about how swamped you are.
- Try to look as flustered as possible.
- Be proactive about deflecting assignments.
- Volunteer for work to gain more control over what's being assigned.
- Lie about things related to your health, stress, or nebulous "personal issues."
- Disappear to reduce the likelihood of being assigned more work during the meeting.

Those who have mastered work avoidance can get more fulfillment from their jobs than those who take it in stride. After all, isn't this (avoiding responsibility) the hallmark of a fulfilling life?

Whether you choose to dodge, prevaricate, or half-ass it, make sure you give it your all (the avoidance, not the work itself), because the alternative asks way too much of you.

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Part 6: Surviving the Day-to-Day (Lord, Give Me the Strength)

To say that day-to-day life in the workplace can be challenging is an understatement. Only the people who put their well-being first will survive with their psyche intact, while the strivers will burn out, give up, or become successful and fulfilled because they achieved their dreams through hard work and perseverance.

Tackle this conundrum head-on to make the most of the aspects of the workplace that are often ignored for shinier objects. It's the things that happen day to day that can really wear you down but you can get around them, so long as you're willing to be a bit shameless.

Deadlines: Are They Important or Merely Suggestions?

Having to do things you don't want to do for money is bad enough but made much worse when there are arbitrary points in time by which a task must be completed. These narrow fields of time are called deadlines, and they make it much more difficult to drag out projects for maximum enjoyment, forcing us to get things done under threat of reprimand or termination.

But how seriously should we take deadlines and is there anything that can be done to mitigate their impact on our prime web-surfing hours? The answer is complicated and will mostly depend on how gullible your manager is.

While advocates might say that deadlines help keep people on track to ensure they remain productive, everybody else knows the truth: deadlines got their name because they make us wish we were dead. That's why missing, avoiding, and ignoring deadlines has become so trendy.

The next time your manager tries to interrupt your life of leisure by giving you a deadline, don't get angry. She's just doing her job. Instead, smile, say thank you, and then do anything and everything possible to meet the deadline, or to get yourself out of the assignment—the choice is yours.

Annual Reviews, Salary Negotiations & Existential Dread

Throughout the term of your employment, you should expect to go through a review process, usually held annually, during which time your manager will determine whether your work has met expectations and whether you deserve a promotion and/or a salary increase.

While we both know you deserve neither, it's in your best interest to play an active role in this process and advocate on your own behalf. As they say, the squeaky wheel gets the grease, and you are very squeaky indeed. The goal is to steer your employer toward an optimistic picture of your productivity and away from the volume and quality of the work you've actually done.

Instead of trying to wing it, you should take the time to properly prepare for your performance review. After all, it will affect how much money you make, which is literally the most important thing in life. Annual reviews are the perfect time to ask for a raise.

Here are some tips:

- Research how much somebody in your role is supposed to earn.
- Try to approach your manager when they're in a good mood.
- Wear your worst outfit so it looks like you can't afford decent clothes.
- Be clear, concise, and vaguely threatening.
- Have a back up plan in case things don't go as planned. Crying is not a back up plan.
- Be prepared to offer an ultimatum. But also be prepared for your supervisor to gladly accept it and show you the door.

As unpleasant as they might be, annual reviews are your best opportunity to get a raise. Management understands that they have to throw their employees a few scraps each year or they'll start to lose valuable employees. The next

time you're asked to do your annual review, make sure you go for broke—you have nothing to lose by trying.

Work-Life Balance and Its Direct Correlation with Being Broke

As children, we learn about wondrous fairy tales designed to enchant and delight us, and to show us that there might be more to the world than meets the eye. The most pervasive fairy tale, however, is the idea of work-life balance—because unless you're working from home, on a part-time basis, while getting paid a full salary, there's really no such thing.

Short of going to prison, there are few ways to feed and house yourself without having to work. While we all wish we could find fulfilling jobs that offer the perfect mix of work and play, the best we can really hope for is a company disorganized enough to allow us to slip through the cracks and a manager aloof enough to let us get away with it.

Work-life balance isn't about perfection. It's about constantly gaming the system in your favor, in ways both big and small, obvious and subtle. Take what you can get and run with it, and never, ever quit.

Part 7: Termination of Employment (Let's Pretend We Liked Each Other)

Like the temporary happiness of your childhood, sooner or later, everything must come to an end. The workplace is no exception and these days, there's nothing unusual about spending a year or two with a firm before moving on to greener pastures.

Is it Time to Move On, or is it Just Indigestion?

At some point in your employment, you might get an uneasy feeling. Before you dismiss it as your run-of-the-mill anxiety, or the by-product of stuffing yourself full of beef every afternoon, you should ask yourself whether your time with your employer is drawing to a close. While knowing when to leave an employer isn't an exact science, there are some signs that might point to yes.

Here are a few that you don't want to miss:

Sign #1: Every morning, you sit in your car with your face in your hands.

Sign #2: Someone offers you a job with better pay or more opportunity for advancement.

Sign #3: Your manager keeps emailing you with the subject line "Please leave."

Sign #4: You're not being praised for every bit of menial effort you manage to squeeze out.

Sign #5: You no longer need to be employed as a condition of your parole.

Knowing when to quit can be difficult, but quitting itself is super easy and feels great. So don't be afraid to throw in the towel when work no longer brings you the joy you feel you deserve, because there's nothing worse than being stuck in a job that's no longer a good fit.

Remember: you are in charge of your destiny, along with a host of seemingly random circumstances over which you literally have no control at all.

Getting Furloughed, Laid Off, Fired, or Summarily Executed

In some cases, the decision of whether to leave will be made for you. There are many ways a company can get rid of you, whether through temporary processes like furloughs or permanent means like layoffs and terminations. Sometimes, you can see your termination coming before it happens.

The following signs may indicate that your employment will soon be coming to an end:

- You receive more than one negative performance review.
- Your boss no longer asks for your help.
- The company puts your personal belongings in a cardboard box every morning.
- Your coworkers start to refer to you in the past tense.

The idea of losing a job that you rely on to pay your crushing monthly expenses can be scary. The fear of not knowing where your next paycheck is coming from tends to cause immense anxiety, though it means literally nothing to your employer, who will forget about you forever the second you step foot out the door.

Look out for yourself and understand your options. You have a choice: you can either view it as negative and feel sorry for yourself, or you can use it as motivation to find a better job that you'll get fired from eventually as well. No matter which you choose, always remember that jobs come and go—but your negative attitude will always remain.

Saying Goodbye

Throughout life, we all experience moments of change. In these moments, we realize we're leaving something behind, which usually brings about a sense of melancholy, a sadness brought forth by the understanding that all we'll have left are memories of times gone by.

Leaving a job is not one of those moments. Leaving a job can be incredibly freeing, and until you run out of money, you might even experience a few fleeting moments of joy.

Because, as you might have gathered from reading this book, joy is rarely found in the workplace.



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