

I Know When You Don't Wash Your Hands, and I'm Not the Only One

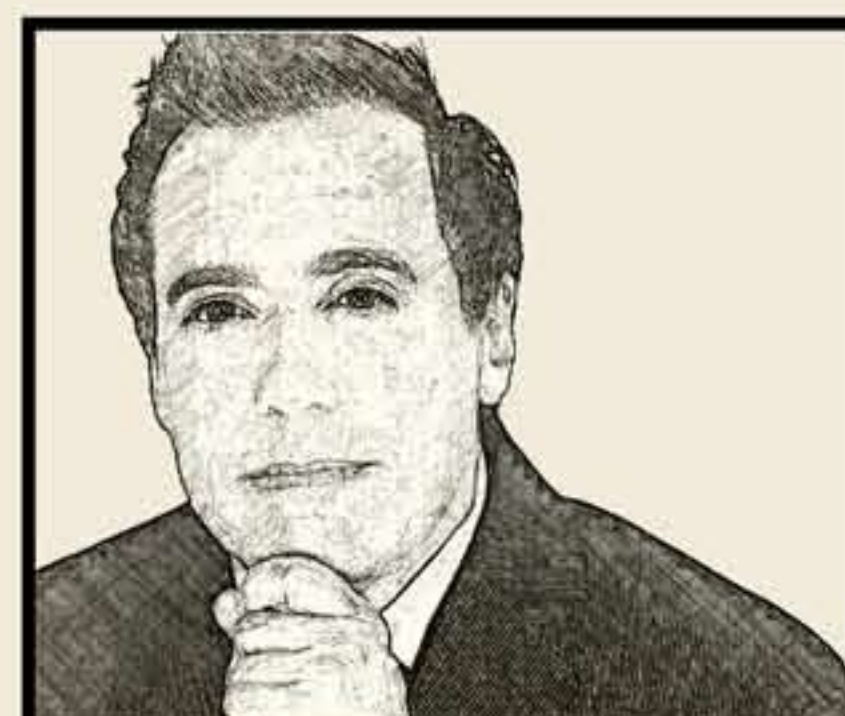
Dear Stephen,

Right off the bat, let me excuse what may be a bit of an inappropriate subject. I really am very prim and proper, and I don't like this sort of talk, but I needed to ask someone about this. When I go to the ladies' restroom room at work, I often notice some of my colleagues not washing their hands. Each and every time I see this I am shocked.

Not washing your hands after using the toilet is disgusting, but not washing your hands after using the bathroom while someone is standing right there watching is beyond the pale. I can only possibly conclude one of two things if you don't wash your hands while I'm standing there. Either you genuinely don't think there is anything wrong with not washing your hands, or you care so little of what I think about you that you don't even want to pretend. No matter what, I now hate you. OK, not hate, but boy do I judge you.

After speaking to a male colleague about this, it seems like the men's room is no different (of course, men are grosser anyway). Some men, I am told, apparently just walk away from the urinal and return to work, where they continue to do things that work requires, like shaking people's hands and touching keyboards. I am not a germaphobe, but I think there needs to be a line. I would think we would all agree that seeing someone walk into the bathroom, use the facilities within earshot, then walk out of the stall, look you in the eye and leave without washing their hands is a bridge too far. Evidently, not.

I've been beating around the bush a bit. My real issue is that this happens all the time with my boss. And trust me she was not in there powdering her nose. How can this not change how I think of her? I may be dating myself with this reference, but every time this happens I can't help but think of the "Seinfeld" episode where



You can send your workplace questions to Stephen at: StephenSays@bellow.press.

Questions selected to be answered, will appear in this column. Please use the Subject: Stephen Says for all emails. Stephen Viscusi is a bestselling author, television personality, and CEO of The Viscusi Group, global executive recruiters located in New York. Follow Stephen on Twitter @WorkplaceGuru, Like Stephen on Facebook; and follow him on LinkedIn.

Jerry is dating a girl whose father is the owner and chef of a restaurant they are eating in. Jerry ends up in the men's room with the father and can't help but notice when the man who will be preparing his dinner does not wash his hands. Jerry ended that relationship. Don't worry, I'm not thinking of quitting my job over this, but is there anything at all that I can do? I know better than to say anything to them, but oh how I wish that I could. Instead, I just tell my co-workers — potty-mouthing, if you will.

Potty Mouter

Dear Potty Mouter,

Well, I sure remember that "Seinfeld" episode, and if the reference goes over some of my readers' heads, they deserve it. (I don't like to get off topic, but if you have the capacity to read this column and have not seen every episode of "Seinfeld," I would highly recommend you fix that glaring hole in your pop-culture knowledge). As you might recall, when Jerry describes the situation to George he says, "at least pretend, at least run the water, for my benefit."

As is usually the case, Seinfeld is dead right. At least pretend. In fact, this is a good rule of office etiquette generally, but let's focus on your

is an overreaction, but anyway you break it down it points to the non-washer's indifference.

Of all places to make this sort of statement, a workplace is about the worst. Even if it doesn't cost someone their job, it could cost relationships. And before you dismiss the possibility of this lack of decorum costing someone their job, I have a story for you. A few weeks ago, a hiring manager at The Viscusi Group was in the restroom with a stranger. This stranger did not wash their hands, and, knowing how I feel about that stuff, the hiring manager came in to tell me about it (I, too, am a potty-mouter). An hour later, the hiring manager came back into

one lesson here is to always wash your hands when you're on an interview!

I'll concede that it isn't the best practice to confront your boss about this stuff. Lucky for me, I am the boss and combative enough that I do confront people. I have, in fact, had this conversation with enough friends to hear all types of excuses. The most plausible out that I've heard from one friend is that the bathrooms at work are so disgusting that he goes back to his office and uses hand sanitizer. That is fine, but here we come back to Jerry. At least pretend! How am I supposed to know that you're going to use hand sanitizer?

When I see someone not wash their hands in the bathroom (and yes, it is OK to call it a bathroom), I take it to mean that they don't care what I think.

specific example. Perception is reality in this situation. Likely, if someone runs the water or puts on a show of washing their hands, even if you don't see them soaping up, you'll give them the benefit of the doubt. It is the brazen people, who don't seem to care at all what you think, that really drives me crazy.

The point that Jerry harps on is how disrespectful not pretending is. When I see someone not wash their hands in the bathroom (and yes, it is OK to call it a bathroom), I take it to mean that they don't care what I think, that my presence means nothing to them. Some may say this

my office. Guess who he had just had a meeting with? Yep. That same person who hadn't washed his hands showed up in my hiring manager's office and held out his hand for him to shake.

There are worse first impressions you can make, but not many. Amazingly, these are just the political reasons that you should wash your hands after using the bathroom at work, but please allow me to make the point — a point that convinces five-year-olds — that not washing your hands is dirty. If, for whatever reason, that isn't enough to convince you to always wash your hands, the

Really, you should wash your hands whenever you use the bathroom (incredible that I need to write that). But if someone else is in the restroom, at least for their benefit, wash your hands! So much of work these days is about the relationships you have. (Speaking of which, "men are gross" is quite the statement — one that I would avoid making in person). Anyway, do not risk these valuable relationships because you are too lazy to do something that is objectively the right thing to do. Or as my Mother would say, "How were you raised?"

Stephen