



USER'S GUIDE:

Discussing Unwritten Rules With Your Supervisors, Employees, and Teams

About Catalyst

Founded in 1962, Catalyst is the leading nonprofit membership organization working globally with businesses and the professions to build inclusive workplaces and expand opportunities for women and business. With offices in the United States, Canada, and Europe, and the support of more than 370 member organizations, Catalyst is the premier resource for research, information, and trusted advice about women at work. Catalyst annually honors exemplary organizational initiatives that promote women's advancement with the Catalyst Award.

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User's Guide: Discussing Unwritten Rules With Your Supervisors, Employees, and Teams

In *Unwritten Rules: What You Don't Know Can Hurt Your Career*, Catalyst describes the unspoken norms and behaviors that are important to advancement in the workplace, but they may not be communicated explicitly as formalized job competencies. Examples of unwritten rules include organizational norms about how the work gets done, different ways in which employees communicate with each other, and flexibility around working hours. The purpose of this user's guide is to give supervisors, employees, and work teams guidance discussing some of the unwritten rules to advancement—as well as the strategies employees use to learn about them—within their organization.

This guide includes three sections:

SECTION 1: BEHAVIORAL CHECKLIST

Please complete the checklist individually and prior to the initial meeting with your supervisor, employee, or working team.

SECTION 2: NOTES PAGE

Please compare your responses on the checklist. Note consistencies and inconsistencies. Provide examples of why you thought particular rules are important.

SECTION 3: QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION

Please use the questions presented in this section as a guide to further understand the rules, both written and unwritten, that are important to career development and advancement within your organization.

SECTION 1: BEHAVIORAL CHECKLIST

Below, a number of behaviors that may be helpful to advance in the workplace are listed.

organization (regardless of whether you have engaged in these behaviors or not)?

In your opinion, how important is each behavior to career advancement and success in your current

Please fill out the checklist individually prior to meeting with your supervisor, employee, or team.

	IMPORTANT	NOT IMPORTANT	DON'T KNOW/NOT SURE
Discussing what I need to do to advance with colleagues and/or peers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Planning a career path early on to figure out what skills and competencies are needed to advance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Making sure I get credit for work I do	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working extra hours, beyond the regular (e.g., 35-40 hour) schedule	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Discussing what I need to do to advance with supervisors and/or higher-level managers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Clearly communicating my willingness to work long hours and/or weekends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Making my accomplishments known to others more senior	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Taking on a variety of work assignments that will increase my knowledge and skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Learning new job competencies through training and development offerings (e.g., courses, workshops)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Using feedback to improve my performance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Seeking out feedback about my performance, even outside the formal review process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working with an executive coach/career counselor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Becoming a member of a FORMAL (e.g., company-based) professional networking program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Asking to be considered for promotion	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Performing well, producing results	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being outspoken about career goals & desired assignments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Face time (i.e., being physically present in the office and at meetings)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Developing a long-term plan for my career (e.g., where I want to be 5-10 years from now)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Communicating effectively with supervisors and coworkers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Developing INFORMAL, work-related networks outside my organization	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Seeking out mentoring relationships with higher-level managers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Developing INFORMAL networks within my organization	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working to consistently exceed performance expectations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="text"/>		

SECTION 2: NOTES

Compare your responses to the Behavioral Checklist with responses of your supervisor, employees, or team. What consistencies did you find? What inconsistencies did you find? Note any that you'd like to discuss further.

CONSISTENCIES

INCONSISTENCIES

NOTES

SECTION 3: DISCUSSION

Use these questions to further understand the rules, both written and unwritten, that are important to career advancement.

1. The Behavioral Checklist asked you about what behaviors are important to advance in your current organization. Which behaviors in the checklist have you *actually* used as a strategy to advance?
2. Are there any Unwritten Rules that you wish you had known about at the very beginning of your career? Discuss how they might have been helpful and whether you'd alert them to others.
3. Now let's shift the attention to those individual skills and characteristics that may be helpful to perform well in your job and organization. These characteristics may vary from one context to the other. Some jobs, for example, favor individuals who work well independently, while other jobs favor those who work well in a team. Some jobs may rely on employees' ability to communicate well and influence others, others on specific technical skills. Some workplaces encourage creativity and innovation, while other workplaces do best when people follow established guidelines. Thinking of your current organization, which employee skills and characteristics are most valued and considered assets for advancement? Please list up to three that you consider especially important.

4. Using the list below as a guide, please discuss how you have learned about unwritten rules to advancement in your current organization and throughout your career. Examples of how people learn about unwritten rules are listed below.

- Asking my immediate supervisor about what I need to do to succeed.
- Asking my mentor(s) about what I need to do to succeed.
- Communicating with people in my professional networks.
- Figuring out what works and what does not work as I go along; through trial and error.
- Observing successful employees' behaviors (e.g., who is being promoted?).
- Seeking out feedback about my job performance on a regular basis, and from a variety of sources, to make sure I am on the right track.
- Taking time to observe how things 'really work' in my organization (e.g., what is the level of formality of employees' interactions? What time do people get to work?).
- Tapping into the knowledge and insights gained through professional coaching services.
- Tapping into the knowledge and insights gained through professional training and development.
- Tapping into the knowledge and insights I've gained in other organizations and jobs.