



More Great Long Island Jobs CareerBuilder Monthly

Find Jobs - Post Resumes - My CareerBuilder - Hourly Workers - Help - For Employers

The best Long Island jobs from Newsday, plus job listings from career sites nationwide.

## Employee makeover

June 11, 2006

In many ways, companies are similar to high school. While the wardrobe may have been upgraded, there are still certain cliques, inside jokes and even office nerds. Though talk of nerds may conjure up images of taped glasses and pocket protectors, those nerdy characteristics could still be prevalent in your office.

Awkwardness and lack of social skills are some ways people typically describe nerds. Though such qualities aren't always bad, an office nerd takes them to the extreme. Sure, most of us have a little geek in us, but according to Kerry Patterson, workplace communication expert and author of "Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High" (McGraw-Hill, \$16.95), if others view you as a nerd, you may not be taken seriously at work. "For instance, you step up to a person who is incredibly good-looking to ask him or her on a date and - bam! - you rocket to the pocket protector end of the continuum," he explains. "In the face of dazzling good looks, you can't find the words you want, stumble over the words you do remember, and when you laugh at whatever he or she says, you sound like a donkey braying."

Walk tall  
Patterson says to present yourself with confidence at work to avoid any misinterpretations. And since this isn't high school, keeping an open mind is key to working effectively with a co-worker who is perceived as a nerd. "Anyone can be a nerd someplace," says Rick Brenner, a teamwork consultant based in Cambridge, Mass. "All it takes is a single-minded devotion to one single field of conversation, where you can project an air of dominance. We tend to use the term 'nerd' to describe those who choose fields of conversation topics that are technical, but the behavior pattern is actually very broad."

Join together  
Similar to Samir and Michael in the workplace classic "Office Space," workers who are considered the office nerds may simply be lacking the right group of like-minded individuals. However, that's not always an option, so it's important to be aware of your demeanor and how others might perceive you. "In terms of building relationships with one's co-workers, being any kind of nerd is probably disadvantageous," Brenner adds. "When the topic specialization is rare, the consequent isolation - which can be lifelong - limits the range of opportunity to practice forming and maintaining relationships, which can lead to a communication skills deficit when dealing with others. Of course, within their own circles, these people can communicate well."

Confidence builders  
If someone has difficulty communicating in the workplace, it's important to provide positive encouragement so as not to cause unnecessary friction. If the offending individual has a support system, they may be more apt to get training on proper communication techniques. "If a nerdy type is motivated, he or she can learn new interpersonal behaviors quite easily," explains Loren Ekroth, an interpersonal specialist and publisher of the "Better Conversations" E-zine. "Programs abound, such as Toastmasters clubs and Dale Carnegie courses."

Low self-esteem can also cause problems with social skills. Positive changes can result from seminars or courses where new social skills and attitudes can be learned, says Ekroth, who is also the founder of National Better Conversation Week (Nov. 20-26, 2006). "Nerdiness is sometimes a plus, because nerds are not socially attractive, and thus, don't spend much time in chitchat," he says. "Instead, they work alone online or in the lab and often produce great results."

Work work work  
With that in mind, these individuals often have a hard time letting go of the day's work even if it means talking about work at inappropriate times. Though the employee may be trying to show his or her enthusiasm about the project, endlessly discussing the topic only harms the person's credibility in social situations. "At the office party, your mind is more concerned with the brilliant campaign you just invented rather than sampling the cheese wheel or cocktails," adds Patterson. "Instead of enjoying the party's atmosphere, you bore one innocent partygoer after another, trailing your victims as they attempt to pass you off to an unsuspecting co-worker - and so goes the evening."

### Most Viewed Stories



- Steph, Isiah could face some stress
- Jubilant grandma hits \$1M state lottery
- Isles not looking to hit a home run
- Property payback
- Mob Cop: I made it all up

### Most Emailed

- Walt Handelsman: N.S.A. Wiretapping
- Walt Handelsman: No place like home
- Navigating water parks
- State study finds no environmental links to LI cancer
- Walt Handelsman: Walt Animates Ann Coulter

More emailed stories

### Local Search



Restaurants | Caterers | Travel | Legal | Wedding Service | Home & Garden | Health & Wellness

Enter a Category

View List

### Featured Advertisers

News on the go  
Get the latest headlines on your cell phone at <http://www.newsday.com>.

### Find It Fast

- Act 2/Retirement Advice
- AP top news
- Archives
- Award Shows
- Academy Awards
- Golden Globes
- Grammys
- Blogs
- Central Park
- Columnists
- Contact Newsday
- Comics
- Corrections
- Crosswords
- Events
- Explore Long Island
- Fashion Week
- Five-day forecast
- The Fold
- Food
- Fun Book
- Ground Zero
- Health
- HiFive / High School sports
- Home and Garden
- Horoscopes
- Impulse
- Jobs
- LI History
- LI: Our Natural World
- Lottery
- Marine forecast
- Movies
- Obituaries

ShopLocal

Grocery coupons

Jobs

Cars.com

Real estate

Classifieds

Dating

Place an ad

Buy tickets

Pay-Per-Click

How2Guide



>NEWS

Long Island

New York City

Business

Sports

Travel

Entertainment

>READER SERVICES

About Newsday

Contact us

Subscribe

Start now and get a \$100 gift card and premium web access!

How to advertise

Career opportunities

Buy photos

Archives

>CONTESTS

Pat Benatar concert

>PARTNERS

New York News from amNY.com

WB11

Star Community Publishing

Island Publications

Tourism

Parents & Children

LI Weddings

Hoy - News in Spanish

Subscribe to Newsday home delivery | Article licensing and reprint options

### SPONSORED LINKS

[Part II](#)  
[Past 7 days](#)  
[Personals](#)  
[Print edition / Today's paper](#)  
[Real Estate](#)  
[Reprint information](#)  
[RSS](#) [XML](#)  
[Schools](#)  
[Science](#)  
[Ski reports](#)  
[Special projects](#)  
[Sports scores](#)  
[Stocks](#)  
[Subscription services](#)  
[Theater](#)  
[Travel](#)  
[Tide charts](#)  
[Weather](#)

[Get the latest headlines on your wireless device at http://www.newsday.com.](http://www.newsday.com)

By visiting this site, you are agreeing to our [Terms of Service](#) and [Privacy Policy](#). Copyright 2006 Newsday Inc.

Partners: Shopping: [ShopLocal.com](#) | [Careerbuilder](#) for jobs | [Cars.com](#) for Autos | [Apartments.com](#) for rentals | [Homescape.com](#) for Homes