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When the boss speaks, staff listen

Jay Remer, **Financial Post**
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Dear Etiquette Guy:

I employ five people in a small shop. I don't have a problem with my employees talking to each other during work, but an issue has come up regarding my handling of their personal conversations.

When I have a question or instruction for an employee that has to do with work, and I walk into the room and determine the employees are engaged in chattering about personal issues, I will interrupt the conversation and ask my question. I feel that time is mine, for work. They feel I should wait until their personal conversation is over before I speak to them about anything. I have been very lenient about the chatter and feel that I have the right to interrupt. Am I being rude? Please let me know if I need an attitude adjustment or they do.

Office Boss

Dear O. B.:

Perhaps you've heard the expression, "give them an inch and they'll take a mile." This is exactly what has happened here, thanks to your first-rate enabling skills.

It's time for you to take charge. Speak with them privately. They need to know that when you want their attention, they need to give it you. You are certainly not being rude. As for an attitude adjustment, I think it's a healthy thing every now and then for everyone. - Jay Remer is the Etiquette Guy. He is trained and certified by the Protocol School of Washington as a consultant for corporate etiquette and international protocol. He lives in St. Andrews, N. B. E-mail your etiquette questions to jay@etiquetteguy.com and visit his Web site at www.etiquetteguy.com.

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