I have a co-worker in my office who uses vulgar language—not just within the office, but also on the telephone with vendors and customers.

I'm a fairly new employee and she has been with the company over 20 years, but I'm appalled and embarrassed by this behavior. What should I do?

While coarse language has no place in the office, some companies tolerate it anyway. It seems likely her language is accepted not only by management, but also by the vendors and customers she talks with.

You have two concerns here: how her language affects the company, and how it affects you. First, decide if, as a new employee, you should be tackling this issue at all. Do other employees use coarse language as well? If coarse language is a part of the company's culture, it will be very hard to change this behavior.

If you decide to move ahead, try asking other employees if they've noticed her language, if they think it affects her work negatively, and if management knows about it and condones it. If their answers indicate you should pursue the situation further, you could raise the issue with your manager on the grounds that it may be hurting the company.

Be aware, though, that once you do, your manager may act—and you may then have to deal with a resentful, angry employee who thinks her actions are none of your business.

In terms of how her language affects you, you might approach her, explain that coarse language makes you uncomfortable, and ask if she'd please try not to use such language around you. If this fails, simply avoid her. If her work station is nearby, ask if you could be moved.

Source: Post, Peter. "Etiquette at Work." Boston Globe 12 Mar 2006.

For more information on Emily Post Business Etiquette Programs contact Director of Sales and Relationships, Dawn Stanyon at Dawn@emilypost.com.