

Professional Etiquette

Introduction

Etiquette plays an important role in the workplace. Regardless of the career field, there are occasions when employees are required to interact and socialize with others (for example, customers, clients, and fellow employees).

Employers seek individuals who make a favorable impression on others. They want employees who represent the organization in a positive light...people who have good manners, display courtesy, and show respect.

The purpose of this publication is to provide some basic information on etiquette and to help you feel more confident and comfortable in the various situations you encounter. Letitia Baldrige, author of Letitia Baldrige's Complete Guide to Executive Manners says it best:

"Good manners are part of working smart. They are the keystone of an efficient, smooth-working organization and are a combination of common sense and consideration for others. A person with good manners makes his or her employer's image shine; people want to do business with that person.

Good manners make the surroundings a better place in which to work and contribute to optimum employee morale. They create an environment in which a code of ethics is accepted as a vital component of the organization's culture.

On the other hand, sloppy manners, a lack of awareness, and an absence of caring are highly visible on any job and make everyone present extremely uncomfortable. Students should begin sharpening their awareness of good human relations and personal skills during the college years, so the transition to the working world is made with finesse, not discomfort."

Making Introductions

The most important rule is to attempt an introduction. It is inconsiderate to ignore a person or to avoid introducing someone to others.

Practice makes perfect, so spend a little time studying the basic rules:

When introducing yourself

- Always introduce yourself and extend your hand to anyone you meet who does not know you.
- Always make eye contact as you shake hands.
- Rise (if seated), step forward, and smile.
- When at a business function, follow your name with your employer's. *"I'm Jane Doe from Clarion University."*
- Repeat the other person's name and say something like, *"Nice to meet you, Dr. Smith."*

When introducing others

Introductions are based on rank, so be sure to give top billing to "the star." Introduce:

- A younger person to an older person. *"Mom, I would like you to meet my roommate, Doug Jones."*
- A junior executive to a senior executive. *"Dr. Smith (vice president), I'd like you to meet our marketing assistant, Bob Jones. Bob, this is Dr. Smith."*
- Your spouse to your boss. *"Dr. Jones, I would like you to meet my husband, Tom Smith."*
- A colleague in your organization to a peer in another organization. *"Amanda Smith (president of AMA at Slippery Rock), I'd like you to meet David Jones (vice president of AMA at Clarion)."*
- A colleague to a customer or client. *"Dr. Bright (a recruiter for Pittsburgh Public Schools), I would like you to meet Dr. Smith. Dr. Smith is a faculty member in Clarion's Education Department."*

The Handshake

A handshake is a big part of making a positive first impression. Practice your handshake using these guidelines:

- Shake hands with your right hand.
- Shake hands firmly (but not with a bone-crushing or fish-limp grip), and with only one squeeze.
- Hold it for a few seconds (only as long as it takes to greet the person), and pump up and down only once or twice.
- Always offer a full palm-to-palm handshake so the “web” between your thumb and index finger meets firmly with the other person’s. This will prevent hurting a woman who is wearing a ring on her right hand, or anyone suffering from arthritis.
- Make eye contact.
- Wear a name tag on your right side, and keep it up toward your shoulder so when you shake hands, the person with whom you’re shaking hands can easily read your name.

Invitation Etiquette

How you respond to an invitation says volumes about your social skills. It reflects negatively on your manners if your response (or lack of response!) to an invitation costs time or money for your host.

- Reply by the date given in the invitation. so the host or hostess knows what kind of arrangements to make for the event, food is not wasted, and unnecessary expense is eliminated.
- If an RSVP card is not included, respond by calling or sending a brief note.
- If you must cancel after initially accepting an invitation, phone your regrets as soon as possible. Send a note of regret following the phone conversation.
- Don’t ask for permission to bring a guest unless the invitation states “... and Guest” or the RSVP card includes “Name of Guest.”
- Arrive at the event promptly, but not too early.
- Mingle and converse with the other guests.
- Don’t overstay your welcome.
- Extend your thanks as you leave.

The Art of Conversation

A good conversationalist:

- Is a good listener...above all else.
- Uses *listening time* as a *learning time*.
- Stands about an arm’s length away when talking with others.
- Is well informed about a variety of topics and is able to vary conversations to fit the person or audience.
- Is polite and has a good sense of humor.
- Shows interest in what other people are doing and makes others feel good.
- Makes the time pass pleasantly.
- Knows how to question another person in a friendly, not prying, manner.
- Makes eye contact when talking to others.
- Avoids correcting another person in public.
- Doesn’t interrupt.
- Doesn’t monopolize the conversation with his/her interests.
- Steps in to fill an embarrassing void in the conversation.
- Acts interested in what people are saying, even if he/she isn’t.
- Avoids highly debatable or controversial topics (e.g., politics and religion).
- Asks open ended questions that require more than a *yes* or *no* response.
- Avoids foul language, unkind statements, and gossip.

The Art of Mixing and Mingling

If you arrive at a business reception or social gathering and find that you don’t know anyone, approach a group of people who seem open to having others join them. Smile, be friendly, and say “*I don’t know anyone here, and I wanted to introduce myself. My name is Mary Jones.*” Most people understand what it is like to enter a room full of strangers and will welcome you into the group.

Approach individuals who are standing alone. They will probably be pleased that you approached them and that they have someone with whom to talk. Begin with some “small talk” and discuss general topics or everyday happenings such as the weather or sports so the other person can participate in the conversation. Give yourself a break on occasion by approaching people whom you know or suggesting that you get a drink or some appetizers.

Table Setting 101

Knowing how tables are set will help you get through most functions, whether they are formal or casual.



FORMAL TABLE SETTING



CASUAL TABLE SETTING

Glasses

- Each place is set with all the glasses that will be used during dinner (except dessert-wine glasses, which are usually brought out when the dessert is served).
- The water glass is set to the right of the plate, just above the knife.
- Wine glasses are set to the right of the water glass in the order in which they are used.

- Often drinking glasses are arranged in a triangular order.
- Coffee cups and saucers may be placed on the table to the right of the knife and spoon.

China

- The only pieces of china that are part of a table setting are the bread plate and a charger or service plate, if it is used. A charger is an oversized plate used for decoration; food is never served on it.
- Soup bowls are placed on top of the charger (if used).
- The charger is usually cleared with the bowl or plate.
- Dinner plates should be placed approximately two inches from the table's edge, centered squarely in front of each chair.
- The bread plate is placed to the right and slightly above charger (at the 10 o'clock position) or the utensils on the right.
- When multiple courses are served, many hosts opt to serve them in courses and place only one dish on the charger at a time.

Silverware

- No matter how formal or casual the event, the silverware is set on the table in the order it will be used, from the outside in. For example, silverware that is used first is found on the farthest left and right sides of the plate.
- Utensils should be about one-half inch away from the plate or each other, and their bottom edges should line up evenly.
- Knives are placed with their cutting edge toward the dinner plate, except for the butter knife.
- Any spoons needed before the dessert (ex. a soup spoon) is placed to the right of the knife.
- Dessert utensils are placed horizontally above the plate. Sometimes, they are brought with the dessert course.

Dessert

- When dessert is served, all wineglasses (except the dessert wine glass), the bread plate, and salt and pepper shakers are cleared from the table.
- The water glass remains on the table for the duration of the meal.

Dining Basics

You'll make a positive impression if you follow these fundamental tips:

Beginning the meal:

- If you are a guest, wait until you receive your host's signal.
- Unfold your napkin and place it on your lap as soon as you are seated. Unfold large dinner napkins in half; open luncheon napkins (usually smaller) completely.
- Keep napkins on your lap when seated. If you must leave the table during a meal, place the napkin on your seat. After the meal, fold the napkin casually on the table.
- Never begin eating any course until everyone has been served or the host/hostess has encouraged you to do so.
- In family-style service, pass the food from the left to the right. If you forget, keep it all going in one direction.

During the meal:

- Do not put your purse, wallet, or cell phone on the table.
- Say "please" and "thank you" when passing food.
- Chew quietly; don't speak with your mouth full.
- Put your hands in your lap or your wrists (not elbows) on the table when not eating.
- Taste your food before using spices.
- Pass the salt and pepper at as set, never separately.
- Never put used silverware on the table.
- No dunking, or "double-dipping."
- Remove foreign items, such as olive pits, the same way they entered your mouth.
- Transport food to your mouth, not your mouth to the food.
- Take modest portions, and cut your meat one piece at a time.
- Discard any wrappers, bones, or olive pits on your bread plate.
- Hold white wine by the stem and red wine by the bowl.
- Refrain from any alcoholic beverage during a mealtime interview.

After the meal:

- Indicate that you are finished with your meal by placing your knife and fork side by

side diagonally across your plate, as if they are pointing to 10. The handles point toward 4, and the blade of the knife faces toward the center of the plate.

Dining Dilemmas

Food in your teeth: Never use a toothpick or your finger to dislodge food. Try drinking some water. If that doesn't work, excuse yourself and go to the rest room.

Bugs, hair, and other objects: Discreetly remove the item and put it under the table without saying a word. And of course, don't finish your course.

Disliked food: Use your utensil and push it around a bit on the plate. Your host will probably be unaware. If he/she remarks that you haven't touched your food, say "I'm just not hungry, thank you."

Spills: When you spill a beverage, don't make a large production of it. If it is a small spill, dab at it unobtrusively three or four times with your napkin. If it is a large spill, tell your host or the waiter so it can be dealt with. Apologize quietly to your host.

Dropped silverware: Leave it on the floor; the waiter will get it later. Quietly ask him/her for a clean utensil.

Bread and butter: Tear off a bite-size piece of bread or roll at a time; butter and eat it.

Olives with pits: If you put the food in your mouth with your fingers, you must take it out with your fingers. Lay the seed on the edge of your bread plate.

Lemons: Hold your hand over and around the lemon as you squeeze to shield it from squirting others.

Cherries and berries: Grasp the stem with your hand and pull while securing the berry with your teeth. Remove a cherry pit from your mouth by hand. Place the pit on your plate or in a cocktail napkin.

Grapes: When displayed in a bowl, do not pull individual grapes from the stem. Break or cut a stem of grapes from the bunch.

What You Need to Know About Interviewing During a Meal

If you're invited to a job interview at the employer's site, the agenda may include lunch or dinner. While you should try to enjoy yourself, remember that your behavior is being evaluated throughout the meal. This is another opportunity for the interviewer (and possibly others) to observe your personality and your poise and learn a great deal about your social skills.

You may dine alone with one person (such as the interviewer or your prospective supervisor) or a group. While dining with four to six strangers may be more of a social challenge, it takes some pressure off you. You won't constantly be the focal point of conversation.

Here are some tips to ensure that your lunch interview is a success.

Let your host or hostess pick the restaurant. Most prospective bosses won't even ask you where you'd like to go. If you're asked, say that "anywhere is fine." If you're pressured to make a choice, suggest a place close to the office that you know will be relatively quiet, where the tables are a reasonable distance apart, and where you feel comfortable with the food and the atmosphere.

Be on time, or a bit early. Tell the restaurant host or hostess you've arrived, and wait by the door or in the entry area. For any other lunch meeting you would proceed to the table, but in this case, don't.

Don't bury your face in the menu. You should appear to study the choices carefully if others are doing the same, but make a quick selection and then look up.

Don't order an alcoholic drink unless others do. Ordering drinks during a mealtime interview can be tricky. Avoid it if you can.

Don't order the same thing as your prospective boss. Your decision may be seen as playing it too safe. However, follow the lead and skip dessert if everyone else does.

Select food that's familiar and easy to eat gracefully. Now is not the time to try fancy new dishes. If you can't find anything familiar on the menu, don't be embarrassed to ask the waitress one or two questions about how a dish

is prepared.

Eat slowly. A mealtime interview may be stressful, but don't bolt your food to put an end to it. Concentrate on the conversation and you'll be less likely to rush.

Converse with the entire group, not just your prospective boss. Address a few remarks to each person present and make eye contact around the table when you answer questions.

Don't criticize the food. Unless you're being interviewed for a food-related position, eat what you can and ignore the rest. Even if others criticize their meals, say nothing.

Don't attempt to pay or split the bill. It's never expected in this situation. However, if you checked your coat, you should pay for that service.

Send your host or hostess a prompt thank-you note for the interview and meal. If you dined with a group, the note should go to the person who picked up the check.

Mealtime Meetings

It is likely that during the course of your job search, you'll receive an invitation to combine interviewing with eating. Increasingly, organizations want to get to know potential employees thoroughly before extending an offer. Interviewing over breakfast, lunch, dinner, or a weekend barbeque is a good way to talk business in a collegial environment while keeping an eye on a candidate's social skills. Hiring managers can tell a lot about interviewees by the way they eat. Employers also use comfortable business meals as a way to assure candidates that the organization will be a welcoming new home.

Aside from camaraderie which dining lends to an occasion, it fulfills two other functions. First, the meal allows prospective managers and colleagues to evaluate how well you handle yourself in a social situation. Many positions require entertaining or deal-making away from the office.

The other major issue at lunch is deciding whether you and the company would be a good match. Employment, not the best steak in

town, is the real reason you are meeting.

The following tips should get you through interview meals with the savoir faire of Miss Manners.

Smoking. No matter what your feelings are regarding this controversial habit, the less said and done regarding this subject, the better. Never smoke unless your companion lights up first. If you're an avid non-smoker and your lunch partner asks for a table in smoking, grin and bear it. If sitting among smokers will activate your allergies, diplomatically request a non-smoking table.

Drinking. When in doubt, don't. If you do, limit yourself to one drink (two at the most) with a long dinner meal. The last thing you need during an interview is impaired judgment.

When in doubt, follow the host. When ordering, use your host as a guide so you stay in the right price range.

Avoid exotic and messy items. Food should enhance your conversation, not detract from it. Select a meal that doesn't require twirling, cracking, digging, sawing, picking or finger-licking, and avoid appetizers and entrees that splash, squirt, crunch, drip, or roll around on your plate.

Downplay dietary preferences. Many people are vegetarians. Others may have allergies to certain foods or want to maintain a low-fat diet. If your food options are limited, keep your preferences low-key. Find something on the menu you can eat, or quietly ask the waiter to substitute fruit for fries.

Brush up on your table manners. Most families don't have a weekly drill on which fork is used for what. Nevertheless, ignorance of table manners is no excuse. Career Services offers a dining etiquette workshop each semester that can assist you in learning dining etiquette basics.

Foreign-owned companies. Executives from many other countries think talking business during a meal is uncivilized. With a citizen of the world, it's wise to confine your conversation to more general subjects.

Thank You Notes

Thank you notes are never out of place, since they are a nice way to acknowledge an individual's thoughtfulness or consideration. They should be brief and written on business (or other appropriate) stationery with a matching envelope.

Thank you notes should be:

- sent within one week.
- a personal message rather than a printed card.
- should be handwritten (if your penmanship is good) for acknowledgement of a favor, gift, or invitation.
- should be typed using a standard business format for acknowledgment of a job interview.

Send thank you notes...

- following a weekend visit.
- after receiving a gift when you are ill.
- for a wedding present.
- to thank those who volunteered on a major project.
- when you are the guest of honor at a dinner or reception.
- following a dinner by your boss.
- after a job interview.
- to thank the person who arranged for you to have a job interview.

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