

# business etiquette:

## *a renewed interest in a lost art*

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Etiquette is not just for those aspiring to the level of Miss Manners anymore. Today organizations are sending managers in record numbers to “finishing schools.” American businesses are spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on etiquette seminars. It is not uncommon for companies to pay \$2500 a day to ensure their managers learn how to mind their p’s and q’s in most business situations. Surprisingly enough, it is the basics that are attracting the most interest.

Careers and business deals can be made or broken as a result of etiquette. Saying or doing the inappropriate thing may cost managers more than they bargained for, and often with them completely unaware of what they did.

Even as informality in dress and environment increase in our organizations, etiquette has become more critical. This has become a key tool in projecting a positive image. Hilka Klinkenberg suggests etiquette is a projection of ourselves and “good manners [are] all about putting people at ease.”

Colleges and universities are preparing graduates with the finer points of business etiquette. Courses are being offered that specifically address etiquette in the business environment. Students dine in replicas of fine restaurants to learn basic business meal etiquette. This is an attempt to ensure those graduates will have an edge in landing (and retaining) plum jobs.

Letitia Baldrige reinforces the critical nature of business etiquette. “Good managers are cost effective. They increase the

quality of life in the workplace, contribute to optimum employee morale, embellish the company image and hence play a major role in generating profit." That is, business etiquette impacts the company's bottom line.

### **Introductions**

Introductions are vital in the creation of good first impressions. When being introduced, one should always give their undivided attention. This means stopping any activity. The person should also stand to be introduced and greet someone.

If seated behind a desk, it is proper to move around to the front of the desk. When introduced, an effort should be made to address the person by name. Repeating their name also serves as a memory aid.

The hand shake still remains critical in first impressions. A firm hand shake is a good first impression. Only one or two hand pumps is appropriate.

A business hand shake is not the priming of a water pump. Greeters should shake and let go. During the hand shake, direct eye contact should be made (while the person's name is being repeated).

Kissing is not appropriate. Some use the rule that one should not kiss anyone unless everyone is to be kissed. The best strategy is not to kiss anyone in business situations.

When conducting the introductions, it is important to know whose name to say first. The older person's name is always given first to a younger person. That is, "Mr. Smith (older), meet Ms. Doe (younger)." The names of those outside the company are given before peers. Senior people in the organization are named before junior people and customers are named before any company employees (including executives).

Formal names should be used in introductions. Cute nicknames should be avoided. Long introductions are also not appropriate. A complete biography on the person is not needed.

### **The Business Dining Experience**

The business lunch should be confirmed the morning of the meeting. The host should also be prepared to pay for the meal. The host should arrive approximately ten minutes early to ensure the reservations are in order and to greet the guest. At this time, all phones and pagers should be turned off or turned to the vibrate position.

At the table there are many opportunities for faux pas to be committed. Within the first ten seconds of everyone being seated, each diner should place their napkins in their laps. The napkin should then be kept in the lap. If it is necessary to leave the table during the meal, the diner should excuse himself or herself and then place the napkin in their chair. The chair should then be pushed

under the table. The napkin should never be placed back on the table until the meal is over and everyone is leaving.

Nothing else should be placed on the table. Keys, briefcases, folders and handbags should be kept on the floor and out of sight. Talk should turn to business after the meal is finished. Any papers to be discussed should be left out of sight until the meal is completed.

It is critical each diner use the proper utensils and use their own. Forks are placed to the left of the plate and knives to the right. Dessert utensils are placed horizontally across the top of the place setting.

Glasses are placed to the right of the plate (for wine and water) while the solids (such as the bread plate) are located to the left of the plate. It makes a very poor impression to eat from the host's bread plate!

The guest should be asked to order first. The host then follows the guest's lead. That is, if the guest orders an appetizer, then the host should do likewise. It is proper to start eating only when the host or hostess has started eating.

If soup is served, the spoon should be scooped away from the diner. Any table items such as bread baskets, butter or condiments should be passed to the right. Dishes with handles should be passed with the handle offered out to the person who is being offered the dish.

Bread should be broken into small bite-size pieces. The bread is buttered piece by piece. Food should be cut into bite size pieces one at a time with the knife being returned to the plate while the pieces are eaten. At the end of the meal, the knife and fork are placed together at a clock's 4:20 position. This signals the server that the diner has completed the meal.

The cocktail party is a special kind of dining experience. Food and drinks should be kept in the left hand to free up the right hand for greeting others. Circulating at the cocktail party is appropriate before moving to the buffet table or the bar.

If alcohol is served, it should be consumed only in moderation. If beer is served in a bottle or can, a glass should be requested from which to drink. Red wine glasses should be held by the bowl while white wine glasses are held by the stem of the glass.

### Meeting Etiquette

With over ten billion meetings held annually in Corporate America, managers would do well to mind their meeting p's and q's. Furthermore, the cost of meetings is increasing. When meetings are held, then, they should be effective and efficient to make good use of the attendees' time and the company's money.

When determining who should attend the meeting, the key is to invite those who are

needed and are considered the "right" attendees for the task at hand. Meeting participants should be given notice of at least two days. The exception is those out-of-towners who should be given a minimum notice of two weeks. It is good etiquette to provide out-of-town participants with as much information as possible about the area hotels, airports, transportation and restaurants.

Meeting participants should be provided all the details of the meeting location in advance. It is always good manners to be prompt. When arriving at a meeting, introductions are always the first order of business.

### Netiquette

Netiquette is the term coined for the etiquette of electronic communication. As the use of e-mail has increased, appropriate behavior (as well as inappropriate) has emerged. E-mail should be used for informal communications and should be kept short. No sensitive messages should be sent via e-mail (such as reprimands).

Informality is no excuse, however, for poor spelling or grammatical errors. A greeting and a closing should be used. Upper case messages should be avoided since that corresponds to shouting. The subject line should provide the receiver with a good idea of what the message pertains to. E-mail is perceived as instant. Replies should be given in 24 to 48 hours.

With a reported 66 million cell phone customers in America, the problem of when to talk has grown. The key to making the "right" decision is often thoughtfulness. Cell phones should be reserved for emergencies while in business situations. When at business meetings and meals, cell phone use should be avoided at all costs - and even turned off. The use of cell phones at inappropriate times is often perceived as someone trying to "seem important." And this certainly is not the image one should try to project.


### General Rules of Etiquette

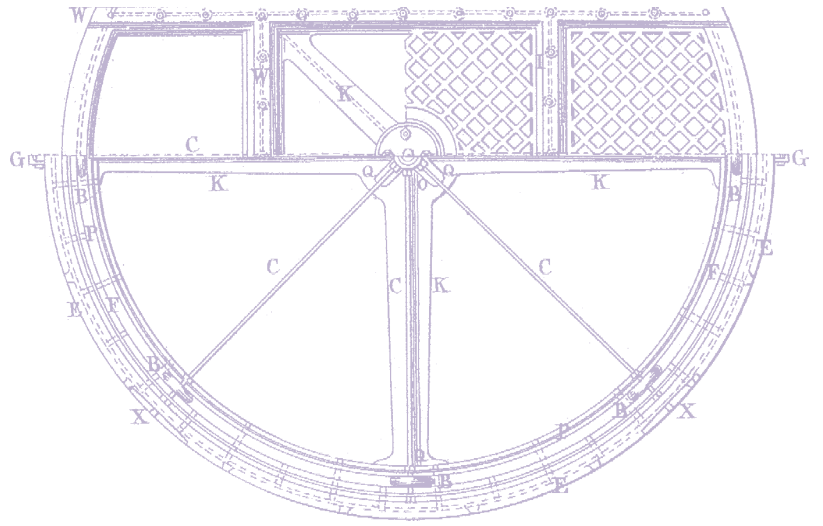
A favorable impression is made by a good listener. Active listening techniques are very effective. This involves repeating back what the speaker has said (by paraphrasing or asking appropriate questions).

Knowing when to speak and when to listen is important. Equally important is knowing what topics are taboo and should be avoided when possible. While it has been common knowledge that religion and politics should be avoided, experts have added to the list. Klinkenberg suggests "health, diets, personal tragedies and the cost of anything not work-related" should not be discussed in business situations.

Holding doors is no longer determined by gender. As a rule of thumb, the first person to arrive at the door holds the door

for everyone else. It is also no longer expected for men to open car doors for women, either. Gender is not the critical factor in determining appropriate behavior, but rather hierarchy.

A book of manners is a requirement for all managers today. It serves as both gentle reminder and as a handy reference when faced with new situations. The business environment today is ripe with opportunities for managers to shine using good etiquette and to create good first impressions. Etiquette can make the difference when trying to land a new customer or applying for a promotion. 



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