

MIND YOUR MANNERS

What does the word etiquette mean to you? A narrow set of rules designed to suppress individuality? An obsession with knowing which fork to use

at a formal luncheon? An attempt to stifle spontaneous self-expression?

Now think of the last time you unwillingly overheard your coworker or classmate making yet another personal phone call. Consider all the forwarded e-mail jokes that keep clogging your inbox. Ponder the rambling messages left on your voice mail. Remember meetings when colleagues talked over or interrupted you.

These and other features of the modern workplace are enough to make you long for a consistent, reliable set of standards that would govern workplace behavior—in other words, a few simple rules of etiquette!

Although the rules are changing, the bottom line is the

same—etiquette simply means behaving in ways that show respect for others. Whether you're trying to navigate your way through introductions, meetings, job interviews, presentations, networking events or year-end gift giving, common courtesy will help you manage and win the respect of others.

Below are a few guidelines to keep in mind:

Introductions

Do you have trouble remembering names? Don't worry—many people do. To avoid embarrassment, restate the name of the person you're meeting once he or she has made the introduction. ["Tom? It's a pleasure to meet you, Tom."] And you can help others remember your name by stating it slowly and clearly.

Wear your nametag near your right shoulder, not your left. When people shake your hand, their eyes will go directly to the tag, which will help them remember our name. And make sure it's visible at all times.

When you're speaking to someone and another person you know walks up, always make introductions.

Offer a memorable piece of information when you make the introduction, which will also serve as a conversation starter. For example, "This is Jayne; she just returned from a trip to Europe."

Telephone Manners

If you're making a call and a receptionist or assistant answers, identify yourself first, then ask to speak to the person you're trying to reach.

When you call someone, always ask if he or she has time to speak to you before you launch into the subject at hand.

Always ask if it's OK—and wait for an answer—before putting someone on hold.

When leaving a voice mail message, clearly state your name (spell it if you've never spoken to the person before), phone number, date and reason for your call. Repeat your name and number at the end of the message.

Don't leave an overly lengthy voice mail message.

Utensils

A good rule of thumb is to work from the outside in, starting with the first course. For example, your salad fork is on the far left of your plate; the one to use with your entrée is to its right. Dessert utensils get top billing above your plate.

Put used silverware on your plate, not directly on the tablecloth.

If you drop a piece of silverware, don't disappear under the table to retrieve it. Flag a waiter and ask for a replacement.

When finished eating, place your knife and fork across your plate, pointing at 11 o'clock.

Don't use chopsticks unless you're adept at it. No one wants to see you chase a piece of moo shu pork around your plate.

Listening

Listening means more than just waiting for your turn to talk again. Concentrate on the other person's words and don't let your mind wander. You may miss an important point and end up asking a question that's already been addressed.

Resist the urge to jump into the conversation when someone pauses in thought. He or she might be searching for words, not inviting a new comment. Wait a beat or two and then respond.

Be an active listener and use body language to show you're paying attention—smile, nod or agree as appropriate.

Learn how to read people's facial expressions and gestures. Watch for nonverbal cues that you've lost their attention or talked too long. ❖

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Online Etiquette Resources

All the Basics
www.etiquetteessentials.com

How NOT to Behave
www.etiquettehell.com

The Guru of Good Manners
www.emilypost.com