

state “[t]his ever-adaptive code of behavior also allows us to be flexible enough to respect those whose beliefs and traditions differ from our own” (Post, 2005).

However, it should be noted that etiquette is not a set of rigid rules, not something simply for the wealthy or well-born, nor is it to be considered a thing of the past or an indication of snobbishness. It is, rather, a sign of civility and courtesy for people of all walks of life and all socio-economic levels (Post, 2005).

Lesson 2: Basic Etiquette & Manners for the Modern World (Part I)

As with most other aspects of life, matters regarding etiquette tend to change with the passage of time. Even though this is a slow process, it is a deliberate one, and the manners and mores that define and direct proper behavior in one period may change significantly by later date. This lesson will not provide a historical overview of etiquette in the United States, but rather present what the proprieties of conduct for certain social situations are in modern America.

Arrive on Time: If you have an appointment with someone or a reservation at a hotel, restaurant, or other business, it is impolite to arrive late. It is advisable to leave with sufficient time to arrive early or exactly at the time agreed upon. If running late cannot be avoided, it is best to phone ahead or contact the other party by some other means to apprise them of the situation and provide a new time of arrival (Ingram, 2005).

Common Courtesies – A Grab Bag of Good Manners: There are numerous small aspects of good etiquette, colloquially referred to as “common

courtesy” or “common decency”, that are worthwhile to remember and practice in everyday life. These things are generally simple, but often overlooked or ignored, such as: waiting your turn, speaking in turn (don’t interrupt or “butt in” when others are speaking), and refraining from gossip or name-calling (it is especially important to teach children this) (Ingram, 2005).

Driving Etiquette: This is a very large area to cover, since there are many aspects to driving and conducting oneself in traffic. However, there are several basic courtesies that should be observed when you travel by vehicle on the road: avoid talking on a cell phone whenever possible while driving (it’s not only considered rude, it’s also been shown to impede driving skill as much as driving while intoxicated), keep your car stereo’s volume at a reasonable level so that you can hear the traffic conditions around you, flash your high beams to let other cars know they have room to cut in, let one car from each lane alternate when a merge is necessary, and always signal when changing lanes (Ingram, 2005).

Email & Text Messaging: As with writing a traditional letter, it is of the utmost importance to be courteous and polite when writing emails or text messages to another party. Emails should never be written in anger (as the harsh words used when sending such messages are impossible to erase), and the same applies to text messages. If an email is sent to the wrong recipients by mistake, a follow-up email should be sent immediately, apologizing for the faux pas (Ingram, 2005). Finally, it is considered impolite to forward unwanted messages and other information via email to strangers or friends if the recipients have not explicitly asked to receive them.

Lesson 3: Basic Etiquette & Manners for the Modern World (Part II)

This lesson is a continuation of the basic etiquette and manners begun in Lesson 2. The list continues in alphabetical order.

Greetings, Introductions, and Exits: It is always considered courteous and polite to greet those with whom one is acquainted. Failing to do so is considered rude and may ultimately hurt the feelings of the party not acknowledged in this manner. When being introduced, it is extremely important to focus on names. No one wants to have to repeat information to lazy listeners. Good eye contact is a must with all persons involved in the introduction. Finally, when bringing a meeting to a conclusion, it is best to be courteous and brief (Post, 2005).

Ladies First: Despite living in a society where empowered and liberated women are more and more prevalent, it is still considered polite for men to allow women to go first through doors, to open doors to buildings and taxis, etc. While some women may take issue with this, it is still by far considered basic manners for male citizens.

Making a Complaint: Once in a while, it becomes necessary to voice a complaint whenever you feel someone or some business has done wrong and “crossed the line”. This is perfectly fine and normal as long as the complaint does not become insulting or abusive in tone. Generally, it is best to calmly state your reasons for being upset and avoid using accusatory language such as “you” and “your” while doing so. This only serves to put people on the defensive and can stand in the way of righting the injustice that’s been done (Ingram, 2005).

Names and Titles: The terms “sir” and “madam” (or “ma’am”), convey “respect and show deference on the part of the speaker” (Post, 2005). These terms are never used between people of equal age, although salespeople (who are serving a customer) or students (when addressing a teacher) can and should use these terms.

Political or Religious Disagreements: In most cases it is quite difficult for people to discuss these two topics in a civil and respectful manner. This is why many companies and online message boards have strict policies banning these two topics from general conversations. If the topics come up naturally, however, and there seems to be a tense situation in the offing (i.e., tempers are stirred and voices are raised), it is often best to agree to disagree, quickly change the topic, or discontinue the conversation altogether (Ingram, 2005).

Riding the Elevator: This is one of the more awkward human experiences—*exactly how* to enter, exit, and behave during a ride on an elevator—especially a crowded elevator. The rules for entering and exiting are simple, but often forgotten or ignored: namely, whoever is in front goes first (Post, 2005). After pushing the button for your desired floor, it is polite to move as far into the back of the elevator as possible. While the elevator is moving, it is impolite to stare at other passengers, smack gum, talk on a cell phone, sing, or create other similar distractions (Post, 2005).

Walking Around: It is considered proper to keep on the right-hand side when walking on sidewalks. However, this is generally not possible on crowded and bustling city walkways. In this latter case, try to avoid making physical

contact with others. When contact cannot be avoided, remember to say “I’m sorry” and continue on your way (Post, 2005).

Lesson 4: Table Manners (Part I)

Perhaps the most-used aspect of etiquette in the United States concerns proper conduct at the table. Americans, possibly more than any other group on Earth, like to eat, so the need for these behavioral parameters comes to our collective attention more often than other facets of good etiquette. This lesson and the next will briefly outline and describe some of the basics of ‘good table manners’.

Can I stir my food? No. It is not considered polite or appropriate to stir or mash up food into a “conglomerate heap on the plate” (Vanderbilt, 1967). Further to this point, gravy is never to be “poured or ladled onto rice, noodles, or other than meat on the plate” (Vanderbilt, 1967). If it is desirable add gravy to potatoes or other bits of food on the plate, this can be done by dipping these items into whatever gravy escapes from the meat (Vanderbilt, 1967).

Can I taste someone else’s food? This is considered quite informal, but is permissible in the case of couples who wish to sample each other’s entrée *only if* a fresh (clean) fork or spoon is used (Vanderbilt, 1967). Once the bite to be shared is on the fork or spoon, it should be handed, handle first, to the other person. It is never appropriate to eat from another’s plate (Vanderbilt, 1967).

Can I use bread to “push” my food? A bit of bread can be used to push food onto a fork or spoon (Vanderbilt, 1967).

How do I use my knife, spoon, and fork? Generally, the fork or spoon is held so that it rests on the middle finger of the hand, with the forefinger and thumb gripping the handle as opposed to the all-too-common practice of holding these utensils in the fist (Post, 2005). The fork can be held with either the tines pointing up (American style), or down (European style), as both are considered appropriate (Post, 2005). The knife should be used in the opposite hand from the fork when cutting up foods, with the fork serving to keep the food from moving while it is being cut.

How should I order? It would seem that such a simple thing as ordering food would be rather self-explanatory. However, there is a socially correct way to do everything, and ordering is no different. While the specifics may vary from restaurant to restaurant, it is always best to be as polite as possible in dealing with the waitstaff, using basic manners such as “please” and “thank you” when ordering and receiving your drinks and food (Ingram, 2005).

Is correct posture important? Yes! It is generally good to sit three to five inches from the table, with both feet flat on the floor (not crossed) and the back straight (not slouching). Food should always be brought to the mouth and not vice versa. And, of course, elbows should never rest on the table but at the diner’s sides (Eberly, 2001).

Lesson 5: Table Manners (Part II)

This section continues the exposition of appropriate table manners begun in Lesson 4.