

Georgia Phi Beta Lambda

**Business
Etiquette
Guide**

By Sam Lester

BUSINESS ETIQUETTE AND PROFESSIONALISM

Etiquette is defined as "the forms, manners, and ceremonies established by convention as acceptable or required in social relations, in a profession, or in official life".

The Opportunity

Business etiquette is made up of significantly more important things than knowing which fork to use at lunch with others. Unfortunately, in the perception of others, the devil is in the details. People may feel that if you can't be trusted not to embarrass yourself in business and social situations, you may lack the self-control necessary to be good at what you do. Etiquette is about presenting yourself with the kind of polish that shows you can be taken seriously. Etiquette is also about being comfortable around people (and making them comfortable around you!)

The Solution

Most behavior that is perceived as disrespectful, discourteous or abrasive is unintentional, and could have been avoided by practicing good manners or etiquette. Basic knowledge and practice of etiquette is a valuable advantage, because in a lot of situations, a second chance may not be possible or practical.

There are many written and unwritten rules and guidelines for etiquette, and it certainly benefits a business person to learn them. The caveat is that there is no possible way to know all of them! Possibilities to commit a mistake pass are limitless, and chances are, sooner or later, you'll make a mistake. But you can minimize them, recover quickly, and avoid causing a bad impression by being generally considerate and attentive to the concerns of others, and by adhering to the basic rules of etiquette. When in doubt, stick to the basics.

The Basics

The most important thing to remember is to be courteous and thoughtful to the people around you, regardless of the situation. Consider other people's feelings, stick to your convictions as diplomatically as possible. Address conflict as situation-related, rather than person-related. Apologize when you step on toes. You can't go too far wrong if you stick with the basics you learned in Kindergarten.

This sounds simple, but the qualities we admire most when we see them in people in leadership positions, those are the very traits we work so hard to teach to our children. If you always behave so that you would not mind your spouse, kids, or grandparents watching you, you're probably doing fine. Avoid raising your voice (surprisingly, it can be much more effective at getting attention when lower it!) using harsh or derogatory language toward anyone (present or absent), or interrupting. You may not get as much "airtime" in meetings at first, but what you do say will be much more effective because it carries the weight of credibility and respectability.

The following are guidelines and tips that we've found helpful for dealing with people in general, in work environments, and in social situations.

It's About People

Talk and visit with people. Don't differentiate by position or standing within the company. Secretaries and janitorial staff actually have tremendous power to help or hinder your career. Next time you need a document prepared or a conference room arranged for a presentation, watch how many people are involved with that process (you'll probably be surprised!) and make it a point to meet them and show your appreciation.

Make it a point to arrive ten or fifteen minutes early and visit with people that work near you. When you're visiting another site, linger over a cup of coffee and introduce yourself to people nearby. If you arrive early

for a meeting, introduce yourself to the other participants. At social occasions, use the circumstances of the event itself as an icebreaker. After introducing yourself, ask how they know the host or how they like the crab dip. Talk a little about yourself- your hobbies, kids, or pets; just enough to get people to open up about theirs and get to know you as a person.

It's a good idea to remember what you can about people; and to be thoughtful. Send cards or letters for birthdays or congratulations of promotions or other events, send flowers for engagements, weddings or in condolence for the death of a loved one or family member. People will remember your kindness, probably much longer than you will!

Peers and Subordinates

Impressing the boss isn't enough.

A 1997 study by Manchester Partners International, says even in this tight job market, 40% of new management hires fail in their first jobs. The key reason for their failure is their inability to build good relationships with peers and subordinates.

Social rank or class is a cornerstone of social interaction in many cultures. The corporate climate in the United States is no exception. People tend to feel uneasy until they've seen an "organizational chart" or figured out who reports to whom. They feel that it is more important to show respect and practice etiquette around superiors than around peers or subordinates. If you show respect and courtesy to everyone, regardless of position or company, you avoid discomfort or damaging your chances in any unexpected turn of events.

Having a consistent demeanor improves your credibility. Even the people at the top will begin to suspect your motives if you treat VIPs with impeccable courtesy and snap at counter clerks.

Superiors

The only thing you owe your boss above and beyond what you owe peers and subordinates is more information. Without exception be sure he or she knows what you're doing, is alerted as early as possible to issues that may arise, and is aware of outcomes and milestones.

Never surprise your boss.

It goes without saying that you should speak well of him or her within and outside the company, and give him or her the benefit of the doubt. (Which you would do for anyone, of course!)

The Workplace

Meetings

- If a subject is important enough to call a meeting, be considerate of the participants' time and ensure that it is well prepared.
- Communicate beforehand: The objective, and the expected duration (Be sure to observe the ending time scrupulously, unless everyone agrees to continue), items expected to be discussed.
- One thing often overlooked- be sure to THANK meeting members for their time and participation, and demonstrate (in the minutes or written record, at least) how their contributions helped meet the objective of the meeting. Participants are frequently left wondering if they've been heard or if their attendance and contributions were noticed.
- Distribute minutes or some written record (no matter how simple the meeting) to all attendees and absentees, with concise but complete descriptions of decisions made and including action items.
- Never assign an action item to a person who is not present to negotiate it, unless you absolutely have to.

The Phone

- Always return calls. Even if you don't yet have an answer to the caller's question, call and explain what you're doing to get the requested information, or direct them to the appropriate place to get it.
- If you're going to be out, have someone pick up your calls or at a minimum, have your answering system tell the caller when you'll be back in the office and when they can expect a call back.
- When you initiate a call and get a receptionist or secretary, identify yourself and tell them the basic nature of your call. That way, you'll be sure you're getting the right person or department and the person you're trying to reach will be able to pull up the appropriate information and help you more efficiently.
- When you're on the receiving end of a phone call, identify yourself and your department. Answer the phone with some enthusiasm or at least warmth, even if you ARE being interrupted, the person on the other end doesn't know that!
- Make sure your voice mail system is working properly and doesn't tell the caller that the mailbox is full, transfer them to nowhere, or ring indefinitely. Address technical and system problems- a rude machine or system is as unacceptable as a rude person.
- Personalize the conversation. Many people act in electronic media (including phone, phone mail, and e-mail) the way they act in their cars. They feel since they're not face-to-face with a person, it is perfectly acceptable to be abrupt, crass, or rude. We need to ensure that we make best use of the advantages of these media without falling headfirst into the disadvantages.

E-mail

- Make the subject line specific. Think of the many messages you're received with the generic subject line, "Hi" or "Just for you."
- Don't forward messages with three pages of mail-to information before they get to the content. In the message you forward, delete the extraneous information such as all the "Memo to," subject, addresses, and date lines.
- When replying to a question, copy only the question into your e-mail, then provide your response. You needn't hit reply automatically, but don't send a bare message that only reads, "Yes." It's too blunt and confuses the reader.
- Address and sign your e-mails. Although this is included in the To and From sections, remember that you're communicating with a person, not a computer.
- DON'T TYPE IN ALL CAPS. IT'S TOO INTENSE, and you appear too lazy to type properly. This is still a written medium. Follow standard writing guidelines as a professional courtesy.

Interruptions

- Avoid interruptions (of singular or group work sessions, meetings, phone calls, or even discussions) if at all possible. Most management folks feel free to interrupt informal working sessions of subordinates, but need to realize that they may be interrupting a brainstorming session that will produce the company's next big success.
- Always apologize if you must interrupt a conversation, meeting, or someone's concentration on a task. Quickly state the nature of what you need, and show consideration for the fact that you are interrupting valuable work or progress.

Appreciation/Credit

Always pass along credit and compliments to EVERYONE who made a contribution to the effort. Speak well of your coworkers and always point out their accomplishments to any interested party. Appearing to have taken the credit in superiors' or customers' eyes is the surest way to sabotage a relationship with a coworker.

Dress/Appearance

- It can be insulting to your coworkers or clients to show a lack of concern about your appearance.
- Being wrinkled, unshaven, smelly or unkempt communicates that you don't care enough about the situation, the people or the company to present yourself respectably.
- If in doubt, always err on the side of conservative. If you think jeans may be OK for a social event but aren't sure, show up in ironed khakis and a nice golf shirt. If you think a situation may call for dress slacks, wear a dress shirt and tie. If you have any inkling that a suit may be called for, dress to the nines.

- Women's clothing is a bit more complicated, but again, err on the side of conservative and dressy.
- Always practice impeccable grooming (even in a jeans environment!)

Social Settings

Many impressions formed during a party, dinner or golf game can make or break a key business arrangement, whether or not business is discussed directly. Always carry business cards.

Introductions

- Before an event, use your address book or your "people database" to refresh your memory about the people you are likely to meet.
- If you forget someone's name, you can sometimes "cover" by introducing a person you do know first. "Do you know my Joe Smith, one of our account reps?" which will usually get the unknown person to introduce him or herself.
- If this doesn't work, an admission that you've had a mental block is preferable to obvious flailing around.

DINING ETIQUETTE

Table Manners (Awards Banquet!)

PBL members should have a solid understanding of dining etiquette. Knowing the simple guidelines and formalities of dining will reflect positively on your image. Not knowing these guidelines can be disastrous. Be sure your focus is on enjoying the dining experience while using your knowledge in dining etiquette to ensure things flow naturally for yourself and those around you.

These days, it is not unreasonable to have a meal interview as a part of the process of landing a job. Employers want to see you in a more social situation to see how you conduct yourself, particularly if your job will involve interacting with clients or supervisors.

The Basics

- Many basic table manners begin with common sense. You should not chew with your mouth open, talk with food in your mouth, stuff food in your mouth too quickly, grab things with your hands, make a mess while eating, say "Yuck!" to anything you are offered, or eat off anyone else's plate.
- Things that are good to do include using your utensils properly, saying "Please" and "Thank You," being respectful of others, speaking softly, and sitting up straight.
- When you sit at a table and prepare to eat, you should always place your napkin in your lap and use it to wipe your mouth and fingers as needed. Wipe the corners of your mouth prior to taking a sip of your beverage so the crumbs don't go from your mouth onto the glass. Pick up your napkin and dab either side of your lips and then set the napkin down and then have a sip of your beverage.
- Women often leave marks of their lipstick on drinking glasses and should take care to drink from the same position of the glass each time so as not to coat the rim of the glass with excess lipstick.
- While eating you may find yourself with an olive pit, piece of gristle, or small bone in your mouth that you do not wish to swallow. This is quite understandable and the item may be removed discreetly with no problem. Never spit the item into your hand or back onto your plate as that would be very rude and highly offensive to other diners. It is best to remove the item using your fork and return it to your plate. If the item is unsightly you can cough the item into your napkin by turning your head, but ideally it's only going to be one or two light coughs.
- Leaving the table should not be done unless absolutely necessary as you want your companions to have your full attention during the meal. When you leave the table, stand up and just say 'Excuse me'. Do not say 'Excuse me I am going to the washroom' or 'Excuse me I am going to make a phone call'. Just say 'Excuse me' or 'Excuse me, I will be back in a moment'. When you leave the table, set your napkin either in your chair or on the left side of your plate to indicate that you are only leaving the table for a break, and are not permanently finished with your meal. Your cutlery should be on the outside edges of the plate.
- Courtesy should always be exhibited while eating with others. This includes such things as not interrupting others when they are speaking, not using your cell phone during a meal, not using crude humor or offensive language, and not making any inappropriate sounds such as slurping or burping. Standards are often higher for the etiquette of those being interviewed, during a business meal, or other gathering of dignitaries, but we should all strive to use our best manners at every meal we consume.
- Always pass food to the right
- Butter should be transferred onto your plate with the knife from the butter dish, then use your own knife to spread the butter onto your food.
- Always scoop food away from you when loading onto your spoon or fork
- Taste your food before seasoning, not doing so is an insult to the chef.
- If eating meat, only cut up enough bites for the next two or three mouthfuls, never cut up the whole piece at once.
- Refrain from blowing your nose at the table.
- Do not stack dishes, nor should you pass dishes to the waiter. Allow the waiter to take care of them.
- You may rest your wrist on the table, but keep your elbows off unless with friends at a very casual meal and no food is on the table.
- At a business dinner/lunch, only exchange business cards at the end of the meal.
- Allow women to sit first.

- Bring food to your mouth, not bringing your face to your food – that is, don't slouch over your food.
- Be aware that different countries have different customs.

Ordering the right way

Although we won't be ordering at the Award's banquet, there might be times when you will. At a formal business meal follow the lead of your host and observe the social hierarchy. If they order an appetizer, do the same so they won't be left dining on theirs alone. Order in a similar price range as your host as it's likely they will pick up the bill. You don't want to over indulge.

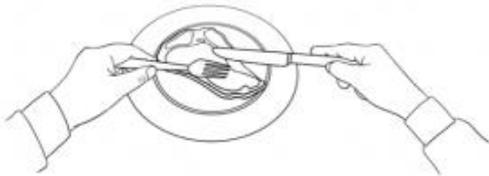
Put some thought into what you are ordering as certain foods may be difficult to eat gracefully- spaghetti, whole lobsters, hamburgers. Save those foods for a more casual dinner out with your buddies.

Know when to start. Once seated you should wait until the host signals to begin before you start eating and drinking. This is done when they place the napkin on their lap and take the first bite at which point you may then do the same. In a formal or business setting the person with the highest social status may signal the start, rather than the host. At a banquet where there is no host at the table, wait until everyone else is served before starting, and if you are last to be served you may suggest to the others "Please go ahead, don't wait for me".

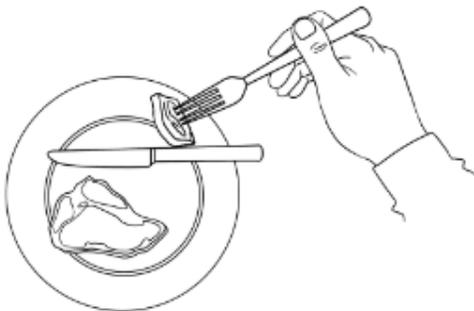
How to hold utensils

The rules of utensils are fairly straight forward, but if you ever get stuck then take a look at what those around you are doing.

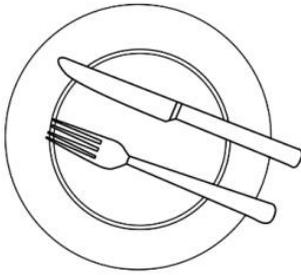
While cutting the food the fork is in the left hand with the tines facing downward to hold the food on the plate while the knife is in the right hand for cutting. After a few bites are cut, place the knife on the edge of the plate with the blade facing inward and switch the fork to your right hand. Tines are facing up when using the fork to pick up food. To cut, use the fork in your left hand with the tines down to hold the food stable, and then cut with the knife in your right hand, as shown below:



Eating style: After cutting, place the knife on the plate with the cutting edge facing the center of the plate. Switch the fork to your right hand. Hold the fork like you would hold a pencil, as shown below:



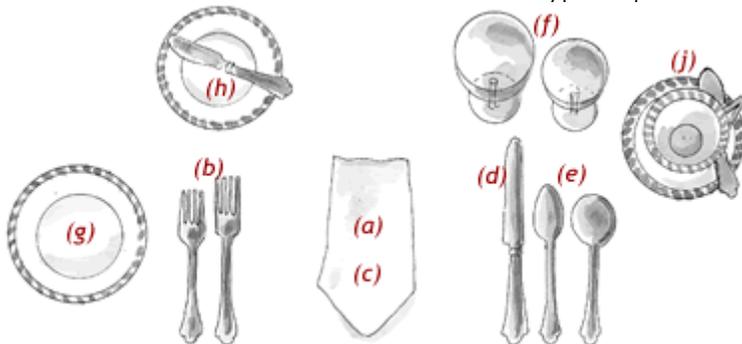
Utensils at Rest: When not using your utensils, rest them on the plate at a 10 o'clock position. Knife above the fork, with the cutting edge facing to the centre of the plate. Fork just below the knife with the tines facing upward.



A fine dining setting may seem intimidating, but if you remember the rule to work from the outside utensils inward you're 90% there – Courses will be served in accordance with the order of your utensils from farthest out to in. After you pick up a utensil it should only be rested on the side of the plate, and never touching the table. To signal that you are finished with a course, rest the utensils on the plate, fork tines up, knife blade in, both laying across the plate pointed from 5 o'clock to 11 o'clock. Unused silverware is left on the table. It's not important to remember which glass is for what, as the waiter will know and fill it up accordingly. .

Place Setting

When a three-course dinner is served, the typical place setting includes these utensils and dishes:



Our illustration above shows how a table would be set for the following menu:

1. Salad or first course
2. Entree
3. Dessert

(a) *Dinner plate*: This is the "hub of the wheel" and is usually the first thing to be set on the table. In our illustration, the dinner plate would be placed where the napkin is, with the napkin on top of the plate.

(b) *Two Forks*: The forks are placed to the left of the plate. The dinner fork, the larger of the two forks, is used for the main course; the smaller fork is used for a salad or an appetizer. The forks are arranged according to when you need to use them, following an "outside-in" order. If the small fork is needed for an appetizer or a salad served before the main course, then it is placed on the left (outside) of the dinner fork.

(c) *Napkin*: The napkin is folded or put in a napkin ring and placed either to the left of the forks or on the center of the dinner plate. Sometimes, a folded napkin is placed under the forks.

(d) *Dinner Knife*: The dinner knife is set immediately to the right of the plate, cutting edge facing inward. (If the main course is meat, a steak knife can take the place of the dinner knife.) The dinner knife may be used for all courses, but a dirty knife should never be placed on the table, placemat or tablecloth.

(e) *Spoons*: Spoons go to the right of the knife. In our illustration, soup is being served first, so the soup spoon goes to the far (outside) right of the dinner knife; the teaspoon or dessert spoon, which will be used last, goes to the left (inside) of the soup spoon, next to the dinner knife.

(f) *Glasses*: Drinking glasses of any kind -- water, wine, juice, iced tea -- are placed at the top right of the dinner plate, above the knives and spoons.

Other dishes and utensils are optional, depending on what is being served, but may include:

(g) *Salad Plate*: This is placed to the left of the forks. If salad is to be eaten with the meal, you can forgo the salad plate and serve it directly on the dinner plate. However, if the entree contains gravy or anything runny, it is better to serve the salad on a separate plate to keep things neater.

(h) *Bread Plate with Butter Knife*: If used, the bread plate goes above the forks, with the butter knife placed diagonally across the edge of the plate, handle on the right side and blade facing down.

(i) *Dessert Spoon and Fork*: These can be placed either horizontally above the dinner plate (the spoon on top with its handle facing to the right; the fork below with its handle facing left); or beside the plate. If placed beside the plate, the fork goes on the left side, closest to the plate (because it will be the last fork used) and the spoon goes on the right side of the plate, to the right of the dinner knife and to the left of the soup spoon.

(j) *Coffee Cup and Saucer*: Our illustration shows a table setting that would be common in a restaurant serving a large number of people at once, with coffee being served during or after the meal. The coffee cup and saucer are placed above and to the right of the knife and spoons.

Tipping

Tipping rewards good service and ensures it in the future. Generally 10-20% of the food or drink bill before taxes, \$1, \$2 for coat check or other minor service, \$3-5 for a car attendant. If you are really unsatisfied with a service you may choose not to tip- though this should be avoided when around colleagues as it may be interpreted as you just being cheap, justified or not. In some cases tips are already included in the bill.

Dealing with dinner mishaps

Dining mishaps will happen even to the best of us and that's just a fact of life. What's most important is to not be fazed. After it happens, take corrective action then carry on with the meal. Never become flustered or setback because only when you do that does it actually become noticeable.

- Dropped utensil – in a formal setting leave it where it is, call over the waiter and ask for a new one. If the waiter sees it they will pick it up. Don't pick it up yourself. At a dinner party where there is no server, just pick it up with your napkin and ask your host politely for a new one.
- Uncooked food – call the waiter and politely explain the food is not cooked properly. They will take care of it from there.
- Food falls off your plate – pick it up with your utensil and place on the edge of your plate.

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