

HOW YOU CONDUCT YOURSELF IN THE BUSINESS WORLD MAKES A DIFFERENCE BY ANNE MESSENGER

MANNERS MATTER



A senior partner of a professional services firm gets a call from the head of a local company — a major client. An associate of the firm, working on site, has dragged a briefcase with metal tips across the client's boardroom table, leaving deep scratches in the mahogany. Cost to firm: Repair expense, embarrassment, possible future business. Cost to company: Aggravation.



A young professional, extremely competent in the job, declines a manager's invitation to attend the Chamber of Commerce annual dinner. Reason: Extreme discomfort, bordering on panic, in business/social settings. Cost to firm: Less company visibility. Cost to employee: Missed opportunities for manager's recognition, for professional growth and for relationship-building with customers.

During a sales presentation by one of three top finalists for IT outsourcing, a small business owner excuses herself to take an emergency call, making it clear that her office manager will continue the meeting. The owner returns in a few minutes, to find the sales representative talking on a cell phone, ignoring the office manager. Cost to IT company: Loss of sale.

Cost to sales representative: Loss of commission. Cost to business: Time.

All of the above are real stories, from real Central New York companies.

We live in a fast-paced culture.

There's no time for a sit-down family dinner, where my sister, my brother and I learned how to properly hold a fork and knife, to try everything on our plates without wrinkling our noses and definitely most definitely to say "please," "thank you" and "excuse me."

There's no time for Sunday dinners at the grandparents', where we learned to be quiet when others were talking, to stand up when being introduced and never, ever chew gum in public.

How does a lack of basic manners play out in business life today?

At the irritation end of the spectrum, cell phones go off during meetings and meals. At the disaster end, confidentiality is breached, revenues decline and reputations are lost.

All reasons why the teaching of manners has shifted from the family dining room table to the corporate training room and library.

Here's a list of some of my favorite resources for etiquette tips:

"Complete Business Etiquette Handbook," by Barbara Pachter and Marjorie Brodya comprehensive volume with easy-to-skim sections like Big Techniques for Small Talk and Professional Presence.

"Essential Business Etiquette" by Lou Kennedy — a concise, easy-to-read, slim handbook begins with pointing out the power of a positive attitude and proceeds with a wide range of helpful tips.

Etiquette Grrls (www.etiquette-grrls.com) — a funky, colorful Web site. Covers items like road trips, dress codes at start-ups, artichoke dip and extremely long lines at amusement parks. The "grrls" take their manners seriously and clearly had a lot of fun putting this site together.

And finally, the most popular tip in our etiquette training, by far: How to Balance Your Plate and Drink and Shake Hands All At the Same Time (www.csuchico.edu/plc/e-etiquette.html).

Cheers!

THREE RULES TO MEMORIZE

1 ETIQUETTE = CARE

Consideration — #1

All — Applies to everyone

Rules — Especially the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you

Excellence — Think "polished"

2 MIND WHAT YOU SAY

With your words: Good morning, hello, welcome, please, thank you, excuse me, I'm sorry

With your body: Maintain eye contact, smile

3 SHOW RESPECT

For others' time — Keep it brief: meetings, voice mails, e-mails, conversations

For someone's gift, loss, and accomplishment — Write a note — card or e-mail will do

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