

## Chapter 1

# Examining Etiquette Basics

### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Taking a close look at your own manners
- ▶ Making a positive impression
- ▶ Showing civility to all folks
- ▶ Using the right words in every situation
- ▶ Entertaining with class
- ▶ Handling special occasions and circumstances

**G**ood manners are all about making people feel comfortable all the time. Believe me, being polite isn't just for high society, formal events, and the boardroom. Good manners are badly needed everywhere every day! This chapter provides an overview of etiquette basics; you discover guidelines on everything from presenting yourself positively to handling special occasions with ease. As you read, grade yourself on how you generally conduct yourself right now, noting where you can improve and bring some style and poise into your behavior. It won't go unnoticed or unrewarded for long.



People have relaxed some rules of etiquette in this century, but you'll find that the ones you read about in this book will last you for the rest of your life. Being rude or unkind will never be in style. And remember: When in doubt, treat other people as you would want to be treated yourself.

## *Taking Pride in Your Own Manners*

Everyone can greatly benefit by relearning and sometimes revising traditional *good manners* as they apply to their lives. The first order of any study is to examine how it affects you and how you can make a difference. Are you well versed in the ways of etiquette?

People are often confused by the complex combination of traditional etiquette and contemporary values. What once was considered a show of respect may now unintentionally offend. In fact, what many once considered acceptable isn't any longer. So, how do you know which rules apply?



Generally, you should always observe etiquette rules that both value human beings and show courtesy. And you should also behave respectfully to everyone, regardless of gender. Why? Because civility builds character and self-esteem. It creates a serene environment and shows regard for yourself and others. Here are a few common courtesies to start you off:

- ✓ Speak softly.
- ✓ Reply when someone speaks to you.
- ✓ Always say "Please," "Thank you," and "Excuse me."
- ✓ Give and receive compliments sincerely.
- ✓ Give people space — don't crowd!

For more on how to take pride in your manners, see Chapter 2.

## ***Making Sure to Present Yourself Positively***

People may try to avoid passing judgment too quickly, but at first meetings, they inevitably assess others by how they look. First impressions: You only get one chance! Psychologists say that most people form impressions of others in the first four minutes after their initial meeting and that 80 percent of the impression is based on nonverbal signs. In other words, what comes out of your mouth has very little to do with how people judge you. And, after a first impression is made, getting people to change that judgment is very hard.



How you dress, groom yourself, and handle yourself in public is all part of your *packaging*. Like product packaging, you can present yourself to be most appealing. And, you can present yourself differently according to the time and place. For example, your appearance should differ depending on your geographic area — how you dress and act in Yellowstone National Park, as opposed to Midtown Manhattan.



Here are a few important guidelines for an appropriate presentation:

- ✓ Being casual doesn't extend to poor grooming — *always* be clean and neat.
- ✓ Avoid clothing extremes, revealing clothing, and evening or party wear in the workplace.
- ✓ Don't sacrifice comfort for trends or fashion.
- ✓ Use good taste or get help figuring out what is tasteful.

You don't need a millionaire's budget to be perceived as confident and self-assured. As important as clothes and makeup are to your image, posture, and how you carry yourself are essential parts of the package. When you stand with a slouch or sit with a slump, you're telling others that you don't feel confident and you'd like to be left alone. On the other hand, when your head is erect, your gaze outward, and your backbone as straight as Mother Nature made possible, you're inviting others to meet with you on equal terms. For more on making a positive impression, see Chapter 3.

## *Extending Courtesy to Everyone in Your Life*

You may feel like you have a lot of rules to follow in order to behave appropriately in all situations. Clearly, one of the most important aspects is getting along with those close to you and with those you interact with on a daily basis. In the following sections, I give you some guidance on being courteous to family, friends, dates, and business colleagues.

### *Family*

Behaving like a polite adult all the time isn't easy, and unfortunately, as time passes, familiarity often leads to shortcuts in considerate communication. However, you can't find a better place to practice good manners than in your own home! Treating your family with respect and exhibiting polite behavior contributes to a peaceful environment and refuge from daily aggravations.

Remember a few of the following tips (for more in-depth advice, check out Chapter 4):

- ✓ **Go ahead and say those nice things.** Don't just enjoy a meal; say that you enjoyed it.
- ✓ **Be considerate of your better half and children by respecting their privacy.** Don't snoop, knock before you enter a room, and practice being a good listener.
- ✓ **Treat your family members as if they were honored guests.** Their responses may surprise you.

## *Friends and relationships*

You have many reasons to figure out good manners and follow the rules of etiquette — especially in personal relationships. Treating others with respect, kindness, and consideration creates meaningful friendships and leads to self-fulfillment. I listed just a few important guidelines here (see Chapter 5 for the full scoop on the art of friendships and relationships):

- ✓ Create boundaries and set limits.
- ✓ Discover how to communicate clearly to avoid misunderstandings.
- ✓ Express delight in other people's accomplishments.
- ✓ Don't give advice unless asked.
- ✓ Figure out when you need to agree to disagree.
- ✓ Never break an appointment with friends in favor of a date.

## *Business colleagues*

In business relationships today, you need to know how to conduct yourself properly in a variety of situations; your ability to respectfully respond to certain individuals and situations can not only put others at ease, but also build your self-confidence. Remember that your behavior is observed and judged daily by employers, clients, and co-workers, and your ability to establish effective working relationships with others can make or break your career.



Regardless of what your job is, you can count on the following do's and don'ts of making a positive impression in the business world:

- ✓ **Never keep people waiting.** If you can't avoid being late, call ahead, and after you arrive, remember to apologize.
- ✓ **Dress appropriately at all times.** When in doubt, always dress conservatively. Look at management for ideas and stay with well-made, tasteful clothes. If your company has a dress code, follow it.
- ✓ **Keep a cheerful, positive attitude.** Don't be a complainer, and always think before you speak. Stay away from gossip, offensive language, or off-color jokes.

Head to Chapter 6 for additional details about etiquette in the workplace.

## *Saying the Right Thing*

Communication is an essential part of being courteous to others — whether you're conversing, writing a letter, talking on the phone, or chatting on the Internet. What you say reflects who you are, so you want your words to build others up, rather than tear them down in any way. And while not everyone is a natural communicator, you can figure out some simple communication tools so you don't come across rude or lacking confidence. In the following sections, I provide you etiquette know-how on various methods of communication.

### *Polite conversation*

A *conversation* is when two or more people discuss different topics, exchange ideas, share information, and give each other an opportunity to contribute. Having a conversation is the best way to find out what other people like, think, and need. It's what people do to get to know one another.

During a chat, always think of the other person. Show your interest by asking questions about her. Asking questions that require more of an answer than yes or no graciously brings the other person into the conversation. For example, instead of asking, "Oh! Is that a new shirt?" you may want to say, "I really like your shirt; it looks great on you. Where did you find it?"

Another objective of polite conversation is to be aware of *how* you say something. The tone of your voice is just as important as what you say. Do your best not to ever use profanity or name call, and try to respond politely and with respect — even if you’re angry. The old adage of “don’t say anything if you can’t say something nice” still applies.



A few additional key elements of a good conversation include the following:

- ✓ Good eye contact and body language
- ✓ Active listening
- ✓ Not interrupting
- ✓ Not monopolizing the conversation
- ✓ Responding and contributing to the conversation
- ✓ Using polite words such as “Please,” “Thank you,” and “Excuse me”
- ✓ Not talking where others can overhear and be put off
- ✓ Avoiding gossip

See Chapter 7 for more information on engaging in polite conversation.

## Correspondence

Interested in writing a letter? Before you begin, you need a few essentials, such as proper stationery, a writing utensil, envelopes, and stamps. A letter also should have the following proper formatting:

- ✓ Address
- ✓ Date or dateline
- ✓ Salutation
- ✓ Main body with headings
- ✓ Closing phrase
- ✓ Signature



With the formatting down, it’s time to write your letter with the right words. The basic rule of etiquette in any circumstance, including written communication, is to have and to show consideration for the other party. If you just stop and think how the other person is likely to receive your communication, you can go a long way in preventing misunderstandings and not giving offense. To find out more about correspondence, see Chapter 8.

## The telephone

Hello! The telephone seems to bring out either the best or the worst in people. If someone is looking for an opportunity to be rude and unmannerly, the telephone provides the perfect avenue. On the other hand, you can bring out the very best in the person on the other end of the line by going the extra mile to be courteous. You can also bring out the best in yourself when using the telephone.



A few elements to keep in mind when speaking on the phone or leaving messages are:

- ✓ Always adjust your tone to be appropriate to the situation.
- ✓ Enunciate clearly, so the person on the other end can understand you.
- ✓ Consider whether you're calling at an appropriate or convenient time. Ask the person you've called whether the time is convenient or if they would like you to return the call at another time.
- ✓ When leaving messages on others' voice mails, speak clearly, slowly, and briefly and tell the person why you called and when she can call you back.
- ✓ Whether or not the person you're calling has your number, show courtesy by leaving it anyway. Say the number and area code at the beginning of your message and again at the end.



Even if the purpose of your call is unpleasant (such as to make a complaint to a store), sounding pleasant can get the conversation off on the right foot and make the recipient of your call more inclined to help you in an equally pleasant manner. Take the opportunity to reinforce your friendships and social and business contacts by exercising your very best manners when using the phone.

For more on using the phone, including cell phones, voice mail, answering machines, caller ID, and teaching telephone etiquette to children, see Chapter 9.

## The World Wide Web



My grandfather always said to never put down in writing what you don't want someone else to read. This saying is a great one to remember when you write e-mails and send communications over the Net. Because you're putting your correspondence into the written word, anyone who receives it can copy, edit, change, store, or otherwise manipulate your message. What you send may be printed for future review. So make sure you never appear rude, intrusive, crass, arrogant, uneducated, or plain lazy.

Here are a few general tips for communicating on the Internet:

- ✓ Always use the subject line to state the purpose of your e-mail.
- ✓ Keep sentences short, clear, and to the point.
- ✓ Spell out words and don't use acronyms; otherwise, your reader may not understand what you're saying.
- ✓ Limit subject matters. People like to read short e-mails.
- ✓ Use words that are simple, clear, and concise.
- ✓ Always use a greeting and salutation.



The Internet is a wonderful source of information and, of course, presents a great ability to share information and have fun. Saying that, it can also be a terrible and frightening place especially for children and unaware users. I recommend that parents take control of their children's computers and place controls and security procedures in place.

For more details and guidelines for minding your cyberspace manners, see Chapter 10.

## ***Business communication***

Communication is essential in business, just as it is in personal life. Check out Chapter 11 for a crash course on the following essential tasks and more:

- ✓ Making introductions
- ✓ Addressing your staff, colleagues, and boss
- ✓ Communicating successfully at meetings
- ✓ Making the most of special business events
- ✓ Handling phone calls, voice mail, faxes, and e-mails
- ✓ Writing business letters

Will knowing the proper way to handle these challenges really make a difference in your career or help you get ahead? Absolutely!



## *A Big Deal: Entertaining (and Being Entertained) with Style*

Entertaining plays an important role in your life, one that is universal to all types of people in every segment of society. Entertaining can do the following:

- ✓ Provide you with invaluable moments, the sharing of your time, home, food, and families.
- ✓ Provide you an avenue through which new relationships and memories are made, ideas are exchanged, and business alliances are formed.
- ✓ Lift your spirits by rescuing you from the same old routine. You just never know what may transpire! When you take time to enjoy the pleasure of another's company, the possibilities are endless!

In the following sections, I outline the important elements of entertaining and being entertained.

### *Dining and drinking*

Polite dining at the table, whether formal or informal, has been one of the codes of behavior that has always set human beings apart from animals. Human beings may also be “animals,” but they think and converse with each other — and this sets people apart from all other creatures. Nowhere else is a person's difference from beasts more evident than in his eating manners and social behavior.

Say the words *dining etiquette* and many people automatically conjure up images of old, stuffy rules of behavior at the dinner table. And long ago, those rigid rules were needed. Formal dining still reflects this level of etiquette, but today, dining has become simplified.



Table manners and dining etiquette are just a means to an end. Knowing how to enjoy the finer things in life — good company, good food, and good conversation — is the backbone of a great dining experience. Knowing proper etiquette simply gives you more confidence in embracing new dining experiences, whether it's dinner at the White House, job interviews over a meal, or brunch at your best friend's home. Dining etiquette today is more important than ever.



Don't eat your food like a vacuum cleaner picking up dust! Take time to talk with those around you and finish when everyone else finishes. Food was meant to be enjoyed, not merely ingested.

Behaving politely at the table, whether informal or not, hasn't disappeared or gone out of style! To find out what to do before dining begins, during the meal, and afterward, see Chapter 12. For details on the wonders of wine, head to Chapter 13.

## *Throwing a get-together*

Being an outstanding host comes naturally for some, but this skill can be learned. What does it mean to be an outstanding host? Simply make sure your guests have a good time. Your guests take subconscious clues from you, so be comfortable. If you're laughing, talking to people, and having a good time, the chances are greater that they will as well.



Here are a few specifics for hosting a memorable event:

- ✓ Select a dynamic blend of invitees and work out the seating before your guests arrive.
- ✓ Invitations should be specific and give guests enough details so they know what to expect.
- ✓ After you've decided on a menu, make sure that you know how to prepare everything.
- ✓ Greet your guests at the entrance with a welcoming smile.



A hostess never allows her guests to drink and then drive. If your guests have had too much to drink, call a taxi or take their car keys and put them up for the night. You can all sleep much more soundly knowing everyone is safe.

For more key strategies for successful entertaining, see Chapter 14.

## *Behaving when you're a guest*

Whether you're a houseguest or attending a grand formal evening, your role as a guest is as important as that of the host. To be a well-mannered guest, you need to do more than be well-mannered. Keep the following tips in mind (and head to Chapter 15 to discover everything you need to know about being a gracious guest who always gets invited back):

- ✓ Respond to invitations promptly.
- ✓ Mingle! Introduce yourself to other guests, start a conversation, and be sure to participate.
- ✓ Use your table manners.
- ✓ When you're a houseguest, offer to pitch in with chores and clean up after yourself — never leave your belongings strewn around the house.
- ✓ Always follow up with a thank-you note, card, or letter of appreciation within a few days of the event (the sooner, the better!).

## *Giving and receiving gifts*

One of the great pleasures in life is giving to others. Giving a gift isn't a simple matter of spending as much as you can afford on an item and just handing it over. Stay within your means when selecting a gift, and keep the recipient in mind.

As the recipient, you need to be mindful of the giver, and be sure to express your thanks for whatever you may have been given. Even if the gift isn't exactly what you were hoping for, you can still show great poise by making the giver feel appreciated.

For the basic responsibilities of the giver and the receiver of gifts, as well as certain etiquette rules to presenting, exchanging, returning, or refusing a gift altogether, check out Chapter 16.

## *Handling Special Situations*

Special occasions such as weddings and funerals can put your manners to the test. Even though you encounter these situations less frequently, they often require you to be aware of a different set of etiquette rules. Travel, whether within your own country or in an entirely new culture, poses challenges as well. And interacting with people who have disabilities or illnesses may take you into a new realm of etiquette in which you're unsure of the proper behavior. I address how to handle these situations in the following sections.

## *Major life events*

Celebrating life's big events are often a challenge: They call on you to stop what you're doing and give of yourself to others. Whether you're attending a christening, a funeral, or a graduation, what matters most is that you're there for your friends and family and that you care. For more information to help you make it through life's major events with grace and style — and your composure intact — see Chapter 17.

## *Engagements and weddings*

One of the most important (and possibly most stressful) events in life is planning a wedding. And traditional wedding etiquette has evolved with time, which only adds to the confusion and uncertainty for the happy couple. You may be wondering who pays for what, what kind of a ceremony should you have, how to deal with blended families, and what you need to include on your invitations. You can find the answers to these and other questions on engagements and weddings in Chapter 18.



Above all, don't turn into bridezilla or the groom from the black lagoon. Try to remain gracious and keep other people's feelings in mind as you proceed with your wedding plans. The big day is yours, and the decisions are yours to make, but you don't need to bulldoze anyone in order to get what you want.



## *Travel near and far*

Being a model of good manners means that when you leave home, your manners travel with you. A few key elements for having a safe and successful trip include the following:

- ✓ Select your travel companions with care.
- ✓ Get to know about the place you'll be traveling to beforehand.
- ✓ Dress appropriately.
- ✓ Behave with extra courtesy in a foreign country.
- ✓ Adapt to local customs of eating and drinking.

Make your way to Chapter 19 for full details for traveling anywhere with your manners intact.

## *Disabilities and illnesses*

The misunderstandings, lack of awareness, and thoughtlessness toward a person with a disability, impairment, or serious illness not only creates barriers, but it also causes fear, hurt, and isolation. As with most equalities issues, use of appropriate language and correct use of terms is crucial for respectful and dignified communication. You need to educate yourself (and perhaps your children) and give considerate thought to remove any unnecessary discrimination and avoid misunderstandings.

For more information about interacting with people who have disabilities and illnesses, see Chapter 20.

