

ETIQUETTE EMERGENCIES *by Melinda Dodd – Hearst Women's Network* *Savvy solutions for life's most uncomfortable moments*

Life should really come with a rulebook. There are so many things you never learn in kindergarten—like how to recover from a fall in public, avoid insulting a friend, retrieve an email mistake, help a hopelessly rude friend, or what to do in a myriad other confusing situations. Luckily, when your personal interactions do become a little awkward, there's one thing you can always call on to save you: *Etiquette*.

Here's how a top etiquette pro suggests you deal with certain dilemmas. Perhaps his wisdom will aid you in the following challenging situations.

What to do when...

You are at a friend's dinner party, and you discover the food is inedible. Do you tell them?

“Shift food around your plate and fake eating it, even if you can't stand it,” says Jon D. Williams, president of JDW Social Education Programs, which licenses social skills experts. “I always tell my students, ‘Don't bite the hand that feeds you.’ You need to act like a gracious guest, not like a spoiled child who's always out to get what they want.”

“It is important to be polite and avoid hurting anyone's feelings. That is a true sign of social intelligence,” Williams continues. “Sometimes what you do may not benefit you directly, but it is the right thing to do. And after all, if you're starving after the meal, chill out, go home and have a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. It's better to be hungry and grumpy than be a social boor.”

You have just accidentally insulted a relative, a longtime friend, or your employer. How do you get out of it?

Williams says, “Falling on one's sword is preferable to say slitting one's throat, self-immolation, or any number of other gruesome ways in which to dispose of oneself. If it was good enough for the Romans..... On the other hand, they also ate dinner lying down. Not too good for the digestion. Apologizing swiftly, earnestly and briefly could prevent a lot of imminently awful things happening to you in the future (like divorce, long lost friendships, pink slips, law suits, etc.). In essence, just say, ‘I'm sorry, please forgive me. I'm an imbecile,’ and get over it. Family will get over it, because they have to live with you. Friends are probably Ok because they know you're an imbecile. But keep in mind, your boss may be looking for an excuse.”

You have just cc'd a private message to the wrong person. What do you do?

“Sorry. It's too late. You not only sent the wrong message to the wrong person. You made a record for all prosperity. The rule of thumb is to never, never email a message to anyone that could compromise you. Email is a document on record,” says Williams. “It's always there. Ready

to strike. To avoid UFO's, Un-Friendly Offenses, when in doubt... don't. Keep your email blunders at bay by one – thinking before you write, two – thinking before you choose recipients, and three – thinking before you send. Better yet, if you have 'sensitive' information to share, call the person or meet the person. Emailing, texting or social networking when you're upset or being mean is right up there with drunk driving. Sooner or later you are going to crash and get burned."

Someone you adore behaves in a way that repels people. Do you tell them?

"Yes," says Williams. "It's not only about the friendship, but about helping them preserve their self respect and or reputation with others. Be honest and tell them 'There are so many things I love about you, but there are some things I believe you and I should talk about.' If they continue to be rude and obnoxious, try 'Are you having a bad day? Have I upset you? I don't understand why you are responding this way. How can I help?' If that doesn't work, and they're not willing to listen, perhaps you should focus on your own preservation, self-respect and reputation."

If you have any questions for Jon D. Williams, you can contact him at jdw@cotillion.com or go to his website at www.jdwsep.com.