

The Importance of Minding your Manners... *not just child's play* By Karen Herzog - Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

Table manners aren't child's play.

But children who don't learn to wait their turn for the potatoes or to chew with their mouth closed may face challenges later in life – especially in their careers.

"The No. 1 reason people lose a job is they don't play well with others," said Mary Spencer, director of placement at the Milwaukee School of Engineering.

Three times a year, the school offers etiquette and interpersonal skill workshops for engineering students who are preparing for job interviews.

Lunch or dinner often is part of job interviews. The prospective employer is attuned not only to what the candidate says, but also how he handles details of dinner – from selecting menu items to finessing conversation, Spencer said. That's because technical job skills aren't all that matter, especially if the job will involve entertaining clients over dinner.

"Table manners are considered shorthand for other aspects of etiquette," said Margery Sinclair of Glendale, Wis., who teaches etiquette classes for both children and business clients. "If table manners are fine, the rest of their social skills are considered good as well. Etiquette refers to all of the rules governing behavior. Manners refers to one's personal behavior."

IF CHILDREN DEVELOP GOOD MANNERS, they grow up with respect and consideration for others, Sinclair said, and tend to have more friends.

"Children who grow up with a knowledge of etiquette have a lifelong advantage," she said.

Sinclair has a favorite quote from "Miss Manners" (Judith Martin): "Sloppy eating habits have probably ruined more relationships than evil hearts."

Stressing table manners from childhood through adulthood sounds a bit old-fashioned, but it's part of the lifelong pursuit of happiness, according to both those who teach etiquette and the professionals who validate its importance.

Spencer said MSOE started offering its workshops on etiquette after getting feedback from business owners and students about skills that needed honing, such as "what to wear to an interview and how to handle dinner."

"Students ate pizza and hamburgers for four years and all of the sudden, they were confronted with multiple forks and questions such as, 'Who orders, can I order a drink, do you

crush the crackers for soup, which fork do I use first, and can I eat the flower on my plate?" Spencer said.

Initially, the school had to do "a lot of selling" to get students who prided themselves on technical job skills to attend etiquette workshops, Spencer said. But turnout has been strong at the workshops taught by outside professionals.

Donna Panko, owner of Professional Skill Builders consulting in Chicago, has taught some of the workshops, which cover general business etiquette and image building.

"I usually do a Dine-and-Learn, where we walk through each course and talk about do's and taboos," Panko said.

MANY TWENTYSOMETHINGS enter the workplace after growing up with parents who didn't take the time to teach etiquette at home, she said.

It doesn't occur to them that, even with a polished resume, etiquette matters, she said. Etiquette is one-third common sense, one-third courteousness and one-third knowledge, Panko said.

"Most people have never really thought about it before," she said. For those who don't know, Americans switch the fork from their left hand – used during cutting – to their right hand to actually eat, while Europeans stick with the left hand for both cutting and eating.

As for the napkin, it is left on the chair if you're planning to return to the table, but placed on the table if you're leaving the table for good.

Table Talk – *tips for home & business*

Enjoying a respectful dinner with family or friends reinforces social relationships, and entertaining clients over dinner establishes the framework for a business relationship.

We asked etiquette experts for tips that cover both scenarios – home and business.

Margery Sinclair, who teaches etiquette, and Donna Panko, owner of Professional Skill Builders, offered the following tips.

Dining at home with friends and/or family:

1. Posture at the table should be straight, not stiff. Good posture reflects self-respect and energy.
2. Entertainment at family dinners is live, not electronic. Turn off the TV.
3. All polite people answer their invitations to dinner, and promptly.
4. At a minimum, have family dinners three times during the week and once on the weekend. Make them a priority.

5. Break the habit of profanity. These words are more effective when used only two or three times in your life.
6. Kids: The mouth has two main functions, talking and eating. Alternate them so no one sees the food in your mouth.
7. Children should begin to clean their own dishes as soon as they are tall enough to reach the kitchen faucet.
8. Don't cut up all the meat on your plate at once. Parents only do that for small children who are incapable of handling a knife and fork themselves.
9. Parents who want to teach their children good manners may pick up tips and information by reading an etiquette book or enrolling their child in an etiquette class.
10. Most important, parents should lead by example at the table.

Business dinners and luncheons

1. If you are a job candidate or client, it's safest to order from the "middle of the menu" price range. Don't order the most expensive item unless the host tells you it's a special occasion and he is ordering the oysters Rockefeller. Don't order the least expensive item, either, because it sends the message you think the host can't afford more.
2. The host should guide clients toward an acceptable price range by recommending an assortment of entrees within that price range. If the client orders an appetizer, the host should, too, so the client is not eating alone. The client should have the best seat at the table.
3. The host is responsible for cueing others whether an alcoholic drink is appropriate by saying something such as: "They have a nice selection of wine, beer or soda here." A general rule: Keep a clear head for business.
4. It's best to begin discussing business only after the main course is served. The host is responsible for deciding when to turn the discussion to business. Establish a rapport first, then talk business.
5. Place a pat of butter on the bread plate. Don't place the whole slice of bread or roll to your mouth to eat it. Break it apart and butter each bite-size piece as you're ready to eat it.
6. Cut one to three pieces of food with your fork in your left hand and knife in right hand, not all the meat at once. The utensil handles should be hidden in your palms, not sticking straight up. Transfer the fork to your right hand to eat, unless you are dining continental style. In Europe, the fork remains in the left hand after cutting the food.
7. Drink from the water and wine glasses on your right; eat the salad and roll on your left. Food is passed to the right.

8. Compliment people on their accomplishments. Save compliments on their appearance for social occasions.
9. Women should not apply lipstick at the table. Like combing hair, grooming should be done in private.
10. Turn off your cellphone. If you are expecting a crucial call, advise everyone at the table that you may be interrupted. Apologize for the interruption and step away from the table to take the call, then turn off the cellphone for the rest of the meal.
11. Doggie bags are never appropriate for a client or customer.
12. Don't stack plates for the server to clear them.
13. It is the host's responsibility to pick up the check.
14. When leaving the table temporarily, place your napkin on your chair. When leaving the restaurant after the meal, place the napkin on the table, either to the left or right of the plate.
15. When someone approaches your table to greet you, stand to show respect, and especially to be introduced to someone new.