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Eating should be done with elegance

Oscar Wilde said, "The world is my oyster, but I used the wrong fork."

My parents were very particular about table manners. My brother once committed a particularly egregious violation and was sent to the back porch to finish his dinner with our dogs because as my mom liked to say, "If we were going to eat like an animal, we were going to eat with the animals." Mom insisted that we had proper dining skills because we never knew when we might have lunch with the queen of England. So far, no lunch invitation has been extended, but when it is, I will be prepared.

It seems basic table manners are not being stressed in America, and as I have discussed in a previous article, appearance is the No.1 factor used in determining a positive or negative impression. Just as we are judged on our appearance, we are also judged on our dining skills. Those with proper table manners will be judged positively and those with poor table manners will be judged negatively.

In today's global market, it is not uncommon for business meetings and interviews to be held over a meal. Also, many companies host dinners for important clients, and the individuals who demonstrate basic table manners will certainly have the advantage over those who do not. In reality, there is no excuse for poor table manners - they are easy to learn. When in doubt, I recommend, whether in a social or a business environment, observing those who exhibit proper manners and following their lead.

Here is a list of helpful hints:

Wait to begin eating until everyone at the table has been served. At a larger table, wait to begin eating until those around you have been served.

Place the napkin in your lap after the host has placed his or her napkin in her lap. If leaving the table for a short period, place the napkin on your chair. Upon completion of the meal, place the napkin to the left of the plate. If the plate has been removed, place the napkin where the plate was located. If the napkin is dropped, discreetly ask the waiter for another one. If dining at someone's house, pick up the napkin yourself. The same rules apply when dropping silverware.

The napkin is to be used for dabbing, not wiping, the lips.

Do not talk with a mouth full of food, chew with your mouth open, or smack your lips. It is easier to take smaller bites in order to participate in the conversation.

When eating bread, break off one bite-sized piece at a time, butter it while still on the plate and then eat it. Also, bread should never be used to soak up juices.

Do not take a drink with food in the mouth.

If you take a bite of something inedible, discreetly remove it from your mouth with your thumb and index finger and place it on the edge of your table.

Sit up straight and keep your elbows off the table. Also, avoid waving the utensils around during conversation and keep your elbows down at your side.

Never pick your teeth or lick your fingers at the table. If an object is caught in your teeth, excuse yourself from the

table and remove it in the restroom.

Pass the salt and pepper shakers together, even if someone only asks for one of them.


Do not engage in personal grooming at the table.

Keep personal items such as purses, cell phones and briefcases off the table. Small purses should be placed in the lap under the napkin; larger bags should be placed under the table by your feet.

Do not push your plate away from you when finished eating.

Manners are noticed by others. Make sure yours are up to par to make a favorable impression for those who are watching.

Jill Haney's Cincinnati-based business, JH Image Consulting, conducts individual and corporate group training on appearance, behavior, and communication. She is a certified image consultant. Reach her at 513-505-2732, jill@jhimage.net, or www.jhimage.net.

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