
Executive Etiquette and Social Presence

2/23/2005

Lecture 5 – Dining Etiquette (Baldrige, Post, Bixler)

If you have received an invitation for a dining event, always respond quickly within one week. There is nothing more courteous than a quick reply, especially if it is to RSVP. The best way to reply will be parallel to the style of your invitation; if you received a phone invitation, return it by phone, or even better, with a note. If you received a formal invitation by mail, reply with a handwritten note.

If you are someone's guest, wait to sit down until your host signals for everyone to be seated, or sits down personally. If your host sits down without indicating your seat, pick the closest one to you. A good host will indicate to her guest where to sit.

When you sit down, unfold your napkin and place it on your lap immediately. If you leave in the middle of the meal, place your napkin on your seat, never on the table! The only time you put your napkin on the table is when the meal is over.

The waiter will serve your food from the left and clear your plate from the right. Wine, however, is poured from the right. If the waiter is serving you out of a plate or a bowl (or if the platters are being passed around), make sure that you always leave the serving utensils in a vertical position on the right side of the bowl. The fork goes inside and the knife/spoon on the outside. If there are no waiters, the dish should be passed starting with the guest on the host's right.

When the food is served, wait until everyone has received his or her food. Even when eating out with friends, this rule should always be observed! Watch the host or guest of honor and begin eating when she does.

I highly recommend that all use the continental, rather than the American eating style. The American eating style is not as graceful or efficient, and we are the only country in the world that uses it. In the continental style of eating, keep your fork in your left hand and knife in the right hand. You never switch your utensils from hand to hand. You can use the knife to subtly push food onto your fork. Your fork prongs should point down.

When breaking bread, only take as much as you will eat and do not touch the rest of the loaf. When eating, break the bread into a bite-sized portion, and then butter it, unless it is a hot bread; in this case, it makes sense to butter the entire portion.

Always pass the salt and pepper together!

Are you on a diet? Keep it a secret! No one wants to hear remarks about the sugar, cholesterol, or carbs that you have given up for the New Year's. This just disrupts people's meals.

Now, onto business dining. Do not spend a great deal of time scrutinizing the menu. Be aware of what others around you are ordering. Be safe and order an entrée; you can always add a salad or appetizer if they have ordered one. Your host should order last. Do not order soup, pasta, BLTs, hamburgers, or anything eaten with fingers. If you drop your napkin or utensil, do not fish for it. Your waiter should be aware of these situations and bring you replacements; if not, kindly ask for them.

If you are interviewing over lunch, or eating lunch with a prospective boss, eat a snack beforehand so that your appetite is not voracious. This way, it will give you more time to talk and less time chewing. You should also never order a drink in this situation; it is always appropriate not to drink.

Place Settings and Utensils

Place Plate-The place plate is placed one inch from the edge of the table. If the first course is already on the place plate, the napkin is placed to the left of the forks, otherwise the napkin will be on the plate.

Forks/Flatware-Handles of the flatware are aligned at the bottom. The forks (no more than three) are at the left of the place plate, placed in order of use, working from the outside in. The oyster fork is the only fork on the right side with the knives, tines of the fork placed upward, across the soup spoon or parallel with the knives.

Often in North America the salad is served prior to the main course. In this case, the salad fork is positioned the furthest from the plate on the left. One would use this fork first. In the case of French style dining, the salad would be served after the main course. In this case, the salad fork would be positioned next to the plate.

Knives-Knives, no more than three, are at the right of the place plate in order of use, from the outside in, with the cutting edge toward the plate. The only spoon (for a first course) is placed to the right of the knives.

Dessert Silverware-The dessert fork and spoon are above the place plate, the bowl of the spoon facing left, the fork below facing right. In the most formal setting, the dessert fork and spoon are brought on the dessert plate.

Glassware-No more than four glasses are set on the table, in order of use, for water, white wine, red wine and champagne, from the left to the right. When filling glasses, do not overfill!

Stemware-Note the shapes of each type of stemware. They all have a unique shape and should only be used for their respective drinks.

Bread and Butter Dish-The butter plate (optional) has the knife placed across the top of the plate, handle to the right, edge of blade toward the user. The salt and pepper are above the place plate, pepper to the left of salt. Larger salts and peppers to be shared are placed slightly below the wine glasses and between every two place settings.

At the end of the meal, you should place your used silverware close together on the plate, with the utensils entirely on the plate (less than an inch of the silverware over the side of the plate). This is a signal to the servers that your meal is finished and the dishes can be removed.

For a formal dessert service, a waiter brings each guest a finger bowl filled with water. The bowl is set on a small lace or organdy doily (optional), which in turn sits on the dessert plate. The dessert fork and spoon are balanced on the plate in this case (instead of sitting at the top of the place setting throughout the meal.) A guest should dip finger tips in the finger bowl, wipe them on his or her napkin, and then remove the finger bowl and doily to the upper left of the place setting. He or she now moves the fork and spoon from the plate to the left and right of the plate respectively. The empty plate is now ready to receive a helping of dessert.

The correct way to cut your meat, whether eating American or continental style, is to grasp your knife and fork in a relaxed, natural manner, never with clenched fists.

In the American style of eating, after cutting your meat, you switch the fork to your right hand, place your fork on the plate, spear a piece of meat, and then eat it.

In the Continental eating style, you keep your fork in your left hand and convey the food to your mouth after cutting each piece. The knife remains in your hand and may be subtly used to get meat or any other food.