

## Your Best Behavior:

# Business Etiquette for Interviewing, Dining and Other Events

**N**ot sure which fork to use for the pasta course, whether to open the door for your boss or how long to wait before calling after an interview? When you network, job hunt, interview and even after you land the job, social skills and basic business etiquette will help you communicate more effectively, build more productive relationships and be more successful.

### Acing the Interview

In a job interview, your key to success is effectively answering the interviewer's questions. That means you must prepare. First, think about yourself. Be ready to explain your personal skills and attributes, your educational background and work experience, and how those things fill a need for the potential employer.

Research the organization so you know its needs: read its promotional literature and Web site; talk to an employee if you know one; if you have an itinerary listing the people you'll meet with during the interview, do quick a Web search on each. Your goal is to create a common knowledge base between yourself and the interviewer, which will allow for a more thoughtful, relaxed interview and help you ask insightful questions. Compile a notebook or fact sheet that you can study so you feel confident going into the interview.

Show up early. Allow time for traffic delays and parking. If you arrive more than 15 minutes early, circle the block or wait in your car and review your notes. Wear a neutral-colored business suit, be well-groomed and pull back long or layered hair. Do not wear heavy perfume or cologne. You want to be remembered for what you said in the interview, not what you wore. Leave your cell phone in the car.

A firm handshake accompanied by a smile is critical for both men and women. Be confident but not arrogant. (Rather than, "You need to hire me," say, "I really feel I can contribute to your organization. I am enthusiastic and a hard worker.") Nod and make eye contact to communicate that you are listening. Be sure you understand the interviewer's questions so that you can provide the right information in your answers. Integrate what you know about the company at appropriate moments in the conversation to show that you have done your research without simply reciting information.

On your way out, ask for a business card so that you have all of your interviewer's contact information (spelled correctly). Reinforce your interest in the position by sending a thank-you

note. Send an e-mail for immediacy; follow up with a hand- or type-written note. Do not buy a thank-you card. As soon as you are alone, write down a quick summary of the interview and the next steps in the process. Reference those things in your thank-you note to show that you were paying attention. If the interviewer recommends any follow-up steps after the interview, do those things within the requested time. Ask for and remember the interviewer's timeline for making a hiring decision. Wait the length of time the interviewer says he or she will need to get back in touch with you before you call to follow up.

### Network It, Baby

When interviewing, you may be asked to attend a business luncheon, dinner or reception. Or, you might attend such an industry event for networking purposes. Either way, treat it as part of the interview and follow basic rules of business etiquette. If dress expectations are not listed on the invitation, contact the host to ask what is appropriate.

As you approach a door, the person closest to it should open and hold it for the others in the group, regardless of gender. When you greet someone, rise if you are seated and shake hands. Be ready to initiate the handshake yourself; there are no gender-specific rules here, either. When introducing two people, direct the introduction of the younger person to the older person, of a non-official person to an official person, of a junior to a senior (in terms of experience or position). Use full names and provide enough background information about each person to help initiate a conversation between them.

Do not address people by their first names until asked. Affix name tags to the front of your right shoulder so your name is visible to a person shaking your hand. Adjust name tags on lanyards so the tag is near the middle of your torso. If you must write your own name, use large, clear letters that can be read by others.

### Dining with the Boss

As with other situations, if you are unsure of the appropriate behavior while dining, defer to common sense. There are a few useful rules, though. When you approach the table, enter your chair from the left; exit from the right. This saves people from bumping into one another. Do not put your purse, cell phone, keys or other items on the table. Keep your elbows off the table, too. With utensils, start from the outside of the

place setting and work your way toward the plate as the meal progresses. If you drop a utensil or if someone accidentally uses part of your place setting, politely ask a server for replacement. (Don't pick up the dropped silverware or take something from another place setting.) Discreetly dab – don't wipe – your mouth or fingers with your napkin. Place it neatly at the left of your plate – not on top of the plate – if you need to leave the table and when you are finished. Place used utensils at the center of your plate at the end of the meal.

When ordering, follow the lead of your host or hostess. It's generally not a good idea, however, to order an alcoholic beverage, even if the interviewer is having one. Choose an entree near the middle of the restaurant's price range. If you are vegetarian or have other dietary restrictions, mention them when you are invited to the meal. If you can't make arrangements beforehand, discreetly ask a member of the wait staff if something that meets your needs can be arranged. Wait for everyone to have been served and others to begin eating before you eat. Thank your host for the meal, but do not offer to pay when you are being interviewed.

### The Great Communicator

Your communication habits in business, like anything else, should be based on common sense and thoughtfulness, regardless of the medium. When using the telephone, have a definite purpose for calling. State your name, your reason for calling and quickly get to the point. Never chew gum, eat or smoke during calls. When you leave voice mail messages, state your name and organization, leave your phone number

twice and be sure to speak clearly. Leave a concise but detailed message, including the information that you need so the individual has the option of leaving an answer on your voice mail, rather than playing phone tag. On your own voice mail greeting, be polite, professional and upbeat. Include alternate contact information – another way the caller can reach you or another person the caller can contact – if you are out of the office.

In e-mail, always use a proper greeting and signature, just as you would in a business letter. Always include identifying information in the subject line. In your message, use complete sentences and correct grammar, spelling and punctuation. Proofread your messages and spell check them before sending. Err on the side of caution when choosing your words for an e-mail, as the reader will not have the benefit of hearing your tone of voice or other non-verbal cues.

Finally, be sensitive to cultural differences in etiquette and communication styles. If you are interviewing or doing business outside the United States, research the customs of the culture you're visiting. ■

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*Based on the Graduate School seminar "Business Etiquette and Interviewing" by Scott Williams and Holly Getchell, Career Center. To view this seminar in full, visit <http://www.grad.uga.edu>.*

### What the Interviewer Really Wants to Know

When you interview for a job, you may encounter a traditional interview format, a behavioral interview or a case interview. An inexperienced interviewer is most likely to rely on a **traditional format**. He or she may start with an ice-breaker question, followed by questions based on your resume. Ask questions of your own and try to steer the interview toward a more conversational tone.

In a **behavioral interview** the interviewer will ask questions that begin with, "Tell me about a time when..." followed by scenarios such as, "you worked in team and what role you played," or "you encountered a certain type of problem and how you solved it." Go into the interview with some experiences in mind that demonstrate your motivation, problem-solving, team work, critical thinking, leadership, communication, organization and stress-management skills.

Management and consulting firms are increasingly relying on **case interviews**, in which they provide you with a business case and you must present suggestions. This is a problem-solving exercise, and you are looking for solutions. Follow all instructions precisely.