Professional Image & Etiquette Handbook



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Mixing & Mingling

Did you know that first impressions are formed within fifteen seconds? It's true that a first impression begins to take shape immediately, is completely formed within fifteen seconds, and can last a lifetime! A first impression is like a filter through which we take in all subsequent information about a person. Therefore, it is critical that your first impression be positive.

Knowing how to meet and mingle in new settings makes us feel comfortable and confident. It also allows us to make a favorable first impression. Unfortunately a lot of times we are not naturally at ease in a room full of strangers. We're not alone, because most people report that they would much rather speak in public than interact with people whom they don't know! Susan RoAne, author of *How to Work a Room,* says that 90 percent of people are not comfortable going to events or programs where they don't know a good number of people.

Despite our reluctance to meet and mingle with strangers, in today's fast-paced environment we can't always wait to be properly introduced. The benefits of learning how to effectively "work" a room are significant. Not only will we feel better about ourselves and be able to make other people feel more at ease, we will also have the potential for starting friendships and making invaluable business contacts.

Setting Ready

- As you prepare to enter a room full of strangers, whether it is at a wedding or a professional conference, start with a positive mental attitude. If you think that you will have a bad time, you will.
- Focus on the benefits of meeting new people. Encourage yourself by asking, "What is the absolute worst thing that could happen?" Even your biggest fears of being rejected or ignored are not life-and-death situations.
- Redefine the term stranger. Maybe when you were five years old your mother warned you not to talk to strangers. However, if you are attending an event or activity with other people, chances are that you have some common interests with others in the room. Identifying the common ground can help you to break the ice.
- ♦ Plan your introduction. What you say about yourself will depend on

where you are. For example, the way that you would introduce yourself at a meeting of a professional association would be different from how you would introduce yourself at a dinner party hosted by a friend. Remember when you introduce yourself to include your name and something about yourself that establishes a common bond with the person with whom you're speaking. Some examples are listed below.

Hi. I'm Laura Smith, a co-worker of the groom.

Hello. I'm Samantha Smith. I work in the dean's office in the College of Business.

Hi. I'm Jeremiah Anderson, and I'm a new member of the Dietetics Association.

- Practice small talk. The goal of engaging in small talk is to make the people involved in the conversation feel comfortable. RoAne says that small talk "should intrigue, delight, amuse, fill up time pleasantly." With this in mind, it is always best to steer clear of dark, serious topics. Don't start a conversation talking about warring countries, suffering children, or politics. Serious discussions have their time and place, but they are rarely appropriate in a setting filled with strangers meeting for the first time.
- Develop a "host" mentality. As a guest in someone's home, you would wait for someone to take your coat, introduce you to the others in the room, offer you a drink, and lead you to an appropriate sitting area. Don't act like a guest. Act like a host. Meet people. Start conversations. Introduce those you are acquainted with to others.

Your Srand Entrance

As you approach strangers, relax and take a deep breath. Regardless of whether your heart is pounding or how the butterflies feel in your stomach, you want to appear calm, confident, and composed. Remember that the first impression that others will have of you is based on those first fifteen seconds.

After you have introduced yourself, guide the conversation by using one of the following tips:

♦ Ask a question. At a meeting or conference, you can simply ask, "Are you a member of this organization?" or "How would you suggest that I get involved in this association?" At a wedding, party, or social event, ask, "Do you know the bride or groom?" or "How do you know the 'birthday boy'?"

Make a positive statement. Observe your surroundings and comment on them.

"This is a great location for a conference."

"The buffet this afternoon was wonderful."

"This area of Chicago is nicer than I expected."

Read and comment on a nametag. At times, you will be able to make a statement or ask a question based on what is on someone's nametag. Perhaps the last name indicates a common ancestry. If the occupation is on the nametag, you can often ask questions related to the person's job.

Keep the Ball Rolling

Silence can be painful, awkward, or boring. Continuing a conversation past the introductions and a few brief statements can be difficult. But if you have a sincere interest in people and are willing to ask lots of questions and wait your turn to speak, you have what it takes to be a great conversationalist.

A good practice is to read the newspaper daily, and even if you aren't a sports fan, read the sports pages. Chances are that at some point you will run into a sports fanatic. Your goal isn't only to talk about what interests you, but also to make people feel comfortable with you and create conversation. If others are interested in the Denver Broncos, the PGA, or the Indiana Pacers, then you will be more prepared to talk to them if you know *something*, even if it isn't a lot, about the sport.

Talking shop at work-related events is also a good topic to fall back on. It is perfectly acceptable to talk with other software developers about the latest in computer technology, to converse with photojournalists about camera equipment, or to gently debate the pros and cons of full-day kindergarten with educators.

Time to Move On

Timing can be everything. You need to be observant when conducting a conversation and notice when people begin to look tired, when the group starts to dwindle, or even when you start to get bored. Making a graceful exit is simple. Just say, "Excuse me, it's been interesting talking to you," and leave. Another strategy for moving on after conversing with someone is to introduce him or her to someone else, facilitate the conversation, and excuse yourself. If you feel as if you cannot get away from a conversation, make up an excuse like needing a drink from the punch bowl or needing to visit the restroom.

Grand Finale

Be sure to thank the host or organizer of an event before you leave. Seek the person out, smile and shake hands. Say goodbye. You want to avoid a long, drawn-out departure during which you and the host say goodbye over and over. You should be as professional, composed, and gracious in exiting as you upon arrival.

Everyone has strengths and weaknesses when it comes to interacting with people in all kinds of settings. Wherever you are, *whoever* you are, you can take advantage of the moment, be a risk-taker, meet strangers, make new friends, and mix and mingle effectively for the rest of your life.

Dressing for Juccess

As was mentioned previously, it only takes fifteen seconds to form a first impression. Perhaps most of that first impression is based upon appearance. In professional settings, your clothing sends a message about you, your organization, and your position. The impression you make is crucial, especially during first meetings.

U)omen

Suits/Dresses

A suit or tailored dress is the most professional attire. Choosing a conservative, classic style is usually a good rule because it is versatile (appropriate in an interview and in many professional settings) and a good investment. Choose a fabric that can carry you through several seasons, such as lightweight wool crepe or wool gabardine. Of course, your chosen career path will influence what you wear. Many career fields, such as law, finance, or accounting, tend to be conservative, a fact reflected in the way people in these fields dress. Other fields, such as fashion design or art, allow greater creative expression. Some professions, such as sales, marketing, and education, bridge the gap between the creative and the traditional fields

Color/Pattern

Build your professional wardrobe around a neutral color like navy, charcoal gray, black, camel (beige, khaki, or taupe), or olive. The best patterns for professional suits are solid, houndstooth, tweed, and plaid.

Shoes

Shoes should be closed-toe pumps, with heels ranging from one to two inches. Styles should be on the conservative side. Neatness is important, so make sure that your shoes are clean and polished. Remember, comfort is essential. Do not buy shoes that hurt.

Accessories

Such accessories as handbags, belts, and scarves should be coordinated with your outfit. When choosing a handbag, pick one versatile enough to coordinate with many outfits. Go with the most prominent neutral color in your wardrobe. Be careful not to overdo your accessories. Remember, your message should stand out, not you.

Jewelry

Stay away from dangling earrings, multiple rings, and noisy bracelets. Jewelry

that moves too much or makes noise is distracting. In selecting jewelry, choose gold, silver, or pearls. Choose small earrings. Pendants or brooches can add a finishing touch to your outfit.

Hair Grooming

Select a hairstyle appropriate for your hair type, face, life-style, profession, and personality. Your hair should be clean, neat, and controlled. A short style is always professional. Long hair should be pulled away from the face for the most professional look. The condition of your hair is also important. Dry, oily, or bleached-out hair communicates poor personal hygiene.

Nails

A neat appearance is important. Nails should be short and well groomed. Choose a neutral shade or clear nail polish.

Makeup

When applying makeup, aim for a natural look that enhances your appearance.



Suits

The best choice in a suit is a pure wool or wool-blend suit in black, navy, or charcoal gray with or without pin-stripes. Single-breasted styles are considered a conservative look. Double-breasted styles are more trendy. Other styles such as muted plaids and tweeds in neutral colors are acceptable.

Shirts

Wear traditional cotton or cotton-blend shirts with long sleeves and straight or button collars. White and light blue are recommended for interview situations. Reserve pin-stripes or chalk-striped shirts for less conservative situations.

Ties

The best fabric for ties is silk, followed by polyester that looks like silk. The tie should just reach your belt buckle. For traditional professions choose from classic polka dot, paisley, or repetitive patterns in dark colors. In nontraditional fields or companies, such trendy patterns as florals may be acceptable.

Shoes

The best shoes for an interview are leather or simulated leather lace-up shoes, like wingtips. Choose dark colors like black, cordovan, or dark brown. Your shoes should match the color of your belt for a coordinated look. Dress socks should match the color of your pants or shoes and should reach mid-calf. Be sure your

shoes are shined, that the edging is not fading and that laces are not broken or frayed.

Jewelry

Watches, wedding rings, and conservative men's rings are appropriate in any situation. Steer clear of items like bracelets and earrings, which convey a more casual look. Facial jewelry is not appropriate for a conservative professional setting.

Grooming

Personal hygiene is essential in all professional settings, including clean and well-groomed hair; clean healthy nails; and well-groomed facial har. A short, conservative hair style is the most professional. If you have a beard of mustache, groom it daily. In particular, your mustache should be well above your upper lip.

Dressing Down with Hyle

Business professional, business casual, casual Fridays, casual everyday. With so many different guidelines, it's no wonder there is confusion about what is appropriate to wear in professional work settings today. There is no longer one right answer to dressing for success. Many organizations now promote their casual work environment as a benefit to attract today's college graduates. At the same time, some organizations have had to set stricter standards for the new casual dress code because they found that employees were taking the term casual to the extreme. So how do you as a young professional just entering the workforce find a happy medium between the gray pin stripe suit and your favorite pair of sweats? Follow these guidelines and you'll soon be on your way to dressing down with style.

Seneral Suidelines

- Break out that ironing board because neatness still counts. Casual clothes should be clean and pressed, never sloppy.
- Business casual does not mean sportswear. You should still look like a professional.
- Use the couch potato test. If you would lie on the couch watching television for an hour in what you are wearing then it probably does not meet the definition of business casual.
- ♦ Business casual means more casual fabric choices. Cotton, linen, corduroy, rayon, and even denim can be appropriate.
- You will have a wider range of choices when it comes to color and pattern, but avoid being too bold or flashy.

Suidelines for Men

- Ties add an individual touch and can still be worn in a business casual environment. There are a variety of nontraditional patterns and solids that can be worn with casual button down shirts that are solid or striped or that have a subtle pattern.
- Shoes should always be clean and polished, but choose a less conservative style like a loafer or plain oxford in leather or suede. Gym

shoes are not usually acceptable for a professional setting so find out the guidelines in your office before making this choice.

- Khakis and corduroys are good choices for slacks. Jeans are fine in some work environments but not all. Not sure? Ask.
- While a suit or sport coat and tie were considered essential at one time, business casual has opened up many more possibilities. Try button-down shirts in stripes, checks, plaids, and denim, polo-style shirts, sweaters, turtlenecks, and vests. You can wear a tie with no sport coat or wear a sport coat with no tie.
- Men should still wear a belt for the most polished appearance.

Suidelines for Women

- Casual choices for women can seem almost endless. Rather than a matched suit, separates are the way to go for a casual look.
- Slacks or skirt? Either is appropriate.
- Skirts can be a variety of lengths, just no shorter than right above the knee. Style and pattern are a matter of choice.
- Slacks range from khakis on the casual end to wool or wool-blend on the dressier side. Choose solids, pin-stripes, houndstooth, tweeds, or glen plaid.
- Whether or not jeans are allowed, you may be able to incorporate denim into your outfit in other ways. Try a denim vest, shirt, dress, or skirt. The darker the denim the more professional the look.
- ♦ Keep accessories simple. Try a scarf or neckerchief for added style.
- Sore feet are a thing of the past. You can wear comfortable shoes like loafers and oxfords.

Dining Etiquette

Imagine for a moment that you have just received a phone call requesting that you visit the company of your dreams for a job interview. You feel prepared. You have an excellent resume and have worked hard on putting together a polished professional portfolio. You have even had a few opportunities to participate in practice interviews. However, during a portion of the interview you will be dining with several professionals in the company. Do you know what to order? Are you sure about where to place your napkin? Have you thought about how to appropriately pass the salt?

Table manners play an important part in making a favorable impression. They are visible signals of the state of our manners and therefore are essential to professional success.

Napkin Use

The meal begins when the host unfolds his or her napkin. Typically, you want to put your napkin on your lap soon after everyone has been seated at the table (but follow your host's lead). Place your napkin on your lap, completely unfolded if it is a small luncheon napkin or in half, lengthwise, if it is a large dinner napkin. The napkin remains on your lap throughout the entire meal and should be used to gently blot your mouth. If you need to leave the table during the meal, place your napkin on your chair or at the left side of your place setting. The host should signal the end of the meal by placing his or her napkin on the table. Once everyone has finished eating, you should place your napkin neatly on the table to the right of your dinner plate. (Do not refold your napkin, but don't wad it up, either.)

Ordering

If, after looking over the menu, there are items you are uncertain about, ask your server any questions you may have. Answering your questions is part of the server's job. It is better to find out before you order that a dish is prepared with something you do not like or are allergic to than to spend the entire meal picking tentatively at your food. An employer will generally suggest that your order be taken first; his or her order will be taken last. Sometimes, however, the server will decide how the ordering will proceed. Often, women's orders are taken before men's.

As a guest, you should not order one of the most expensive items on the menu or more than two courses unless your host indicates that it is all right. If

the host says, "I'm going to try this delicious-sounding cheesecake; why don't you try dessert too," or "The prime rib is the specialty here; I think you'd enjoy it," then it is all right to order that item if you would like. The best bet is to allow your host to take the lead. If this does not happen, it is appropriate to ask, "What do you recommend?" or "What is the specialty of the restaurant?" Word to the wise—don't choose the most expensive item on the menu, and don't order unfamiliar food or food that will be difficult to eat while also taking part in conversation.

Using Filverware

Choosing the correct silverware from the variety in front of you is not as difficult as it may first appear. Starting with the knife, fork, or spoon that is farthest from your plate, work your way in, using one utensil for each course. The salad fork is on your outermost left, followed by your dinner fork. Your soup spoon is on your outermost right, followed by your salad knife and dinner knife. Your dessert spoon and fork are above your plate or brought out with dessert. If you remember the rule to work from the outside in, you'll be fine.

There are two ways to use a knife and fork to cut and eat your food. They are the American style and the European or Continental style. Either style is considered appropriate. In the American style, one cuts the food by holding the knife in the right hand and the fork in the left hand with the fork tines holding the food to the plate. Cut a few bite-size pieces of food, then lay your knife across the top edge of your plate with the sharp edge of the blade facing in. Change your fork from your left to your right hand to eat, fork tines facing up. (If you are lefthanded, keep your fork in your left hand, tines facing up.) The European or Continental style is similar to the American style in that you cut your meat by holding your knife in your right hand while securing your food with your fork in your left hand. However, your fork remains in your left hand, tines facing down, and the knife in your right hand. Simply eat the cut pieces of food by picking them up with your fork still in your left hand with the tines facing down.

The difficulty with European style is that all food should be brought to your mouth with the fork tines down, including mashed potatoes, rice, peas, and other side dishes. These foods can be moved onto the back of the fork using your knife or speared with your fork tines when possible. Using this style comfortably takes practice and experience.

When You Are Finished

Do not push your plate away from you when you have finished eating. Leave your plate where it is in the place setting. The common way to show that you are finished with your meal is to lay your fork and knife horizontally or diagonally across your plate. Place them side by side, with the sharp side of the knife blade

facing toward you and the fork, tines down, to the left of the knife. The knife and fork can be placed horizontally as if they are pointing to the numbers 9 and 3 on a clock face or diagonally as if they are pointing to the numbers 10 and 4. Make sure they are placed in such a way that they do not slide off the plate as it is being removed. If you are dining European style, place the fork and knife vertically as if they are pointing to the numbers 12 and 6 on a clock face. Once you have used a piece of silverware, never place it back on the table. Do not leave a used spoon in a cup, either; place it on the saucer. You can leave a soup spoon in a soup plate if it does not have a service plate. Any unused silverware is simply left on the table.

If you need to pause during the meal for conversation or to leave the room temporarily, you will need to place your silverware in the resting position. This will tell the server that you are not yet finished. In the American style of dining, you should place your knife horizontally across the top of your plate with the handle to the right and the blade facing toward you. Your fork should be placed on the plate diagonally with the tines still facing up. This rest position makes it natural for you to pick up your fork and resume dining. In the European style of dining, you should place your knife diagonally across the plate with the handle to the right and the blade facing inward. Your fork should also be placed diagonally across the plate with the handle to the left and the tines facing down. The fork tines can rest on top of the blade of the knife.

Basic Table Manners

- ♦ It is inappropriate to ask for a **doggy bag** when you are a guest. Save the doggy bag for informal dining situations.
- It is best to order foods that can be eaten with a knife and fork. Finger foods can be messy and are best left for informal dining.
- Do not order alcoholic beverages. Drinking too much when dining out is one of the most disliked behaviors.
- ◆ Do not **smoke** while dining out.
- ♦ The use of **glassware** can be confusing especially if there are wine glasses present. Remember that your place setting follows this simple rule: solids to the left, liquids to the right.
- ♦ Sit up straight at the table. It makes a good impression.
- When you are not eating, keep your hands on your lap or resting on the table (with wrists on the edge of the table). Elbows on the table are acceptable only between courses, not while you are eating.

- ◆ Do not season your food before you have tasted it.
- ♦ Never **chew** with your mouth open or make loud noises when you eat.
- ♦ Although it is possible to **talk** with a small piece of food in your mouth, do not talk with your mouth full.
- ♦ Do not **slurp** soup from a spoon. Spoon the soup away from you when you take it out of the bowl and sip it from the side of the spoon. If your soup is too hot to eat, let it sit until it cools; do not blow on it.
- ♦ If food gets caught between your **teeth** and you can't remove it with your tongue, leave the table and go to a mirror where you can remove the food from your teeth in private.
- ♦ Your dinner **knife** will be closest to your plate on the right hand side, and will be used to cut meat and vegetables. It can also be used to cut your salad leaves. When you do not have a butter knife (which will be lying on the top edge of your bread plate when present), use the dinner knife as your butter knife. The cutting edge of the blade always faces the plate. Your place setting may also include a steak knife or a fish knife. The two can be distinguished by the serrated edge and pointed tip of the steak knife, whereas the fish knife has an unusual shape and a smooth edge.
- You should not leave the table during the meal except in an emergency. If you must go to the bathroom or if you suddenly become sick, simply excuse yourself. Later you can apologize to the host by saying that you didn't feel well.
- ◆ If you need something that you cannot reach easily, politely ask the person closest to the item you need to pass it to you. For example, "After you have used them yourself, would you please pass me the salt and pepper?"
- Always pass the salt and pepper together, even if only one was requested. They are considered a set.
- When passing a food item around a table, you should first offer it to the person on your left, help yourself, and then pass it to the right.
- If a piece of your silverware falls onto the floor, pick it up if you can reach it and let the server know you need a clean one. If you cannot reach it, tell the server you dropped it and ask for a clean one.

- If you or someone you are dining with is lefthanded, it is best for the lefthanded person to sit at the left end or at the head of the table. This arrangement helps ensure that everyone has adequate elbow room to eat comfortably.
- If **food spills** off your plate, you may pick it up with a piece of your silverware and place it on the edge of your plate.
- Notify your server when assistance is needed for large spills and apologize to the group. Small spills on your clothing can be simply cleaned by wetting a small corner of your napkin in your water glass and blotting at the spill.
- Never smoke at the table!
- Never spit a piece of bad food or tough gristle into your napkin. Remove the food from your mouth using the same utensil it went in with. Place the piece of food on the edge of your plate. If possible, cover it with some other food from your plate.
- When adding sugar from a packet to iced tea or coffee, tear the packet threequarters of the way across the top and pour the sugar into your beverage. You should then fold the empty packet and tuck it under the edge of your saucer.
- When adding lemon to iced or hot tea, cup your hand around the lemon before squeezing. You can put the squeezed lemon in your drink or on your saucer.
- Bread and rolls should be eaten by tearing off a bite-sized piece and buttering it.

Last Words

As with everything in life, when it comes to refining different aspects of professional image and dining etiquette in your life, practice will make perfect. The more opportunities that you make for yourself to practice mingling with strangers, dressing professionally, and dining appropriately, the more successful you will be when it counts.

For more information on professional image and dining etiquette, visit the Career and Experiential Learning Resource Lab in Lucina Hall 235. The lab has hundreds of career resources including books directly related to image and etiquette: *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Successful Dressing, 5 Steps to Professional Presence, Business Etiquette and Professionalism, A Foot in the Door, How to Work a Room, International Business Etiquette, and more!*