

Modern Meeting Manners

By Melissa McGavick, WBN Cranberry Chapter Member, WBN President of the Board 2009 -2010

Just a gentle reminder, “your manners are showing.” Yes manners, etiquette: a quaint subject no longer relevant in today’s world or so it would seem. However manners really do matter. Manners, or shall I say lack of manners, it what keeps audiences tuned into the majority of reality television shows. I watched as a person’s ideal potential client simply got up and walked away after that person unknowingly insulted him. People lose business opportunities, personal friendships and dignity because of their poor business manners.

The nearly 50 etiquette books on my shelves cover just about every subject where two or more people come in contact or close proximity of each other. Although there are hundreds of tips we could talk about when it comes to etiquette, in the space allotted for this article there are only so many we can cover. So let’s just focus a dozen meeting manners tips relevant to a typical WBN chapter meeting.

1. Be prepared for the meeting. Have your commercial planned ahead of time so you can focus on the conversations going on right now. Having a prepared commercial that fits within the allotted time frame also makes you look more polished than rambling on and on after your time is up. Although you may be trying to get more information to your audience, they know when your time has elapsed and are irritated that you are taking more time than you should.
2. Dress for the meeting. No you don’t have to wear a suit but you should consider the image you are leaving in the minds of other members and especially guests. Recently, I had a brought a guest to a meeting. After the meeting she asked me if she had correctly understood the profession of one person in particular. She was surprised that she had heard correctly. The member was a well educated and smart business professional with years of experience who that day decided to wear her workout wear. That included an ill-fitting tank top and a pair of really short shorts tennis shoes, with her hair unwashed and in a ponytail. The first impression the guest interpreted was that the member was not very professional. That also reflected poorly on the group overall.
3. Watch your language. Swearing is so common place today that we often don’t even hear it slip out. But some people are very sensitive to it. Using bad language may make a teenager feel big and bad, but it steals your credibility as a professional.
4. Turn of the cell phone ringer. Ringing cell phones in the middle of a meeting are distracting and annoying. That goes for the constant ding from incoming texts, emails and facebook updates. It is easy enough to adjust the settings to silence and vibrate.
5. Sit with different people at each meeting. Sitting with the same friend each meeting limits your networking and makes you appear aloof.
6. Pay attention when someone is speaking. What goes around comes around. If you want them to listen to you, you want to demonstrate how interested you are in them. (See the table topics library for the article on this subject.)
7. Don’t comment on every commercial, or during the member business presentation. Wait until the appropriate time to ask questions or make comments. I have personally witnessed one member interrupt another member’s business presentation about 1 minute in and proceed to take over the entire allotted time. The person who was supposed to be giving her presentation decided the group was not for her because she didn’t think people cared and did not listen to her.
8. Learn the back bone of meeting civility, meeting parliamentary procedure. This knowledge will serve you well and give you confidence in professional settings. (See the table topics library for the article on this subject.)
9. When handed a business card, don’t just stuff it in your pocket or purse. Read it, say thank you reciprocate with one of your own.
10. When you are given a referral, say thank you immediately. After responding to it, tell the person who referred you how it went and say thank you again. Some professions such as healthcare and finance are not permitted to tell how it went but they can still say thank you.
11. Learn to shake hands properly. Shaking hands is a normal business greeting. Your handshake says a lot about your confidence level and business experience. Negotiators judge their opponents by how they shake hands. Now there are two reasons not to: 1. You are sick, or 2. you have religious convictions that do not permit it. If you are sick or have reasons not to shake hands. Simply say, “I am not feeling well. So I’m not shaking hands today. It is great to see you,” or “I don’t shake hands, but is wonderful to meet you.” If someone says this to you, do not

take it as a slight. Be happy they care enough to keep their sickness to themselves or that you have met the kind of person that knows how to keep a commitment.

12. If you are sick, think about how you would feel if you are sitting right beside you. Is it dire for you to attend? Today people forget that not everyone wants your cold. This is why WBN's attendance policy leaves room for absences. If you are not feeling well, it is not polite to pass it around, if not necessary. If you do attend, come prepared to deal with the typical illness issues. Bring enough tissues, a bottle of water or cup of tea, cough drops, hand sanitizer to share, and sit where you will be the least intrusive with coughing and spreading your illness.

Well that's a dozen. Etiquette is not about making yourself superior it is about putting other people first. Putting others first is a sure sign to show you care.



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Melissa has served as a Chapter Rep and Chapter Chair of the Cranberry WBN chapter, chaired ten different WBN committees, served as both Vice-President (2008-2009) and President (2009-2010) of the WBN Board of Directors. In 2008 she was selected as the WBN Woman of the Year. Melissa has also served in the top leadership positions in four other non-profit organizations, including the Pittsburgh chapter of the Downtown Women's Club, Women Entrepreneurs in Business, Women Think P.I.N.K., and Toastmasters International District 13.

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