

## Chapter 1 from Emily Post's Etiquette: The 18<sup>th</sup> Edition...

### Guidelines for Living

Scientific and medical advancements have made life easier over the years, but the stresses and strains that come with population density, technological advancements, 24/7 news and entertainment media, and a redefinition of the family have resulted in a whole new set of challenges. People behave no worse than they used to, but with the pressures of modern life it can be more difficult to stay civil. In this fast-paced society with its multiple demands, it's all the more important to be intentional about using common courtesies in our everyday interactions.

It's true that we take a more casual approach to dressing, communicating, and entertaining. But casualness, or informality, doesn't necessarily equate to rudeness. It's just as easy to be polite when wearing jeans to a party as when wearing long white gloves to a ball.

Manners by their very nature adapt to the times. While today's manners may be more situational, tailored to particular circumstances and the expectations of those around us, they remain a combination of common sense, generosity of spirit, and a few specific "rules" that help us interact thoughtfully. And as fluid as manners are, they all rest on the same fundamental principles: respect, consideration, and honesty.

**Respect.** Respecting other people means recognizing their value as human beings, regardless of their background, race, or creed. It's demonstrated in all your day-to-day relations—refraining from demeaning others for their ideas and opinions, refusing to laugh at racist or sexist jokes, putting prejudices aside, and staying open-minded. We show respect not just by what we refrain from doing but also by intentional acts, such as being on time, dressing appropriately, or giving our full attention to the person or people we're with.

Self-respect is just as important as respect for others. A person who respects herself isn't boastful or pushy but is secure in a way that inspires confidence in others. She values herself regardless of her physical attributes or individual talents, understanding that integrity and character are what really matter.

**Consideration.** The key to consideration is thoughtful behavior. Being thoughtful means thinking about what you can do for those around you and how your actions will affect them. Consideration leads us to help a friend or stranger in need, to bestow a token of appreciation, or to offer praise.

**Honesty.** Honesty ensures that we act sincerely and with integrity. It's the basis of tact: using empathy to find the positive truth and telling or acting on it, without causing embarrassment or pain.

### Two Other Essential Qualities

Graciousness and kindness are an integral part of courteous behavior. Graciousness is the ability to make other people feel welcome and comfortable in your world. Kindness is much like consideration but it also reflects the warmth in your heart.

## **Actions Express Attitude**

Courteous people are empathetic—able to relate emotionally to the feelings of others. They listen closely to what people say. They observe what’s going on around them and register what they see. Courteous people are flexible, willing to adjust their own behavior to the needs and feelings of others, while maintaining their integrity. Courteous people are forgiving and understand that nobody is perfect. They would never embarrass or judge someone for a mistake in form, such as using the wrong fork or introducing people out of order. They don’t keep an etiquette scorecard.

## **Etiquette is . . .**

**Fluid . . .** not a set of rigid rules. Manners change over time and reflect the best practices of our times. Etiquette isn’t a set of “prescriptions for properness” but merely the guidelines for doing things in ways that make people feel comfortable.

**For everyone . . .** not something for the wealthy or wellborn. Etiquette is a code of behavior for people from all walks of life, every socioeconomic group, and of all ages. Good manners are a valuable asset and cost nothing to acquire.

**Current . . .** not a thing of the past. The bedrock principles of etiquette remain as solid as they ever were. Manners change over time and across cultural boundaries, but the principles are universal and timeless.

**Unpretentious . . .** not snobbish. A polite person doesn’t try to be someone he’s not, nor does he look down on others.

## **Why Etiquette Matters**

Grounded as it is in timeless principles, etiquette enables us to face whatever the future may bring with strength of character and integrity. This ever-adaptive code of behavior also allows us to be flexible enough to respect those whose beliefs and traditions differ from our own. Civility and courtesy, the outward expressions of human decency, are the proverbial glue that holds society together—qualities that are more important than ever in today’s complex and changing world.