

# Oh, behave!

## Etiquette training helps employees mind their manners

By Alison Shipley  
REDEYE

Climbing the corporate ladder or attempting to boost business can mean attending networking events that take place outside the office, including lunch with potential clients and even dinner at the boss' house. Corporate etiquette expert Lori Ann Robinson has some advice for those events: Don't gobble your food like you just came off "Survivor."

With more people working at home in virtual offices and so much business being conducted electronically, face-to-face interaction is waning. But what happens when the e-mail inbox is closed and the Blackberry is stashed away?

Employees seem to have lost sight of basic telephone etiquette and person-to-person interaction, said Robinson, and employers want to fix it.

"Lately, I'm seeing more and more companies send employees to etiquette workshops and seminars," said Robinson, who for more than 20 years has been teaching employees how to improve table manners, the way they dress (often too provocatively) and networking skills.

Advanced Equities, an investment bank in Chicago, recently required its employees to attend an etiquette training session intended to increase business and create better relationships with clients. The course, which focused on professional ways to speak to clients over the phone, trained employees to handle difficult clients appropriately and properly greet a caller, using techniques such as letting clients know whom they're speaking with,

said Christine Iversen, 21, an employee at Advanced Equities who attended the training session.

"I think I did a lot of those things naturally," said Iversen, who lives in Wicker Park. "But after the training, I definitely made a more conscious effort to make sure I did them all the time."

When employees are sent to etiquette training to improve their manners, sometimes they arrive feeling offended, Robinson said. But people should be grateful for the training because the lessons learned can flow into their personal lives too, she said.

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## 5 RULES TO WORK BY

Meeting in person rather than communicating through e-mail can put your verbal and nonverbal communication skills to the test. Here are five rules etiquette trainer Lori Ann Robinson said to keep in mind when mingling at networking events or dining with execs. [A.S.]

### 1 Your appearance is a visual extension of your business card

"All the time, I see people at networking events with unkempt hair, ill-fitting clothes and not looking polished," Robinson said. "It's important to speak your business through your appearance."

For the most part, men dress appropriately, Robinson said, but women tend to fall off the dress-code wagon.

"A lot of women don't know what business casual means," Robinson said. "Often women wear clothing to networking events that they would wear on a date or to the theater."

Robinson suggests that for business casual events, women should play it safe and pair a sweater or knit cardigan with dress pants.

"Even if you're an entrepreneur and your company is on its last \$1,000, always look like the polished professional you are," she said. "Fake it until you make it."

### 2 Don't give 'em the dead fish

People will take you seriously if you carry yourself well and speak your business through your body language, Robinson said.

"If you're shaking hands with a woman, don't think you should just hold their little fingers," she said. "Don't be afraid to squeeze a little."

Potential clients take handshakes and body language into consideration.

"Offering someone the dead fish handshake or the bone crusher isn't correct," Robinson said. "You want to make sure that you're giving a proper palm-to-palm handshake because it shows that you're genuinely excited to meet that person."

### 3 Lay off the Crackberry

At meetings and networking events, turn off the cell phone and put the Blackberry away.

Robinson said she once walked by a meeting that was taking place in a glass conference room and saw everyone had their heads bowed down.

"I thought they were praying!" she said. "But no, they were using their Blackberries and not listening to the executive giving the meeting."

If you are expecting a call, or you must check your messages at a business function, excuse yourself and go to the restroom.

"If someone is speaking, pay attention," she said. "Don't think we don't see you text messaging and moving your thumbs around under the table."

### 4 Get your hands out of your mouth

Robinson said she once got stuck sitting next to a woman who chewed on her fingernails throughout the entire meal.

"Don't put your hands in your mouth in public," she said. "Especially at a business function."

If you have something stuck in your teeth, don't put your finger in your mouth to fish it out.

"It's looks completely unprofessional. Just excuse yourself and go to the bathroom," Robinson said.

### 5 If you're going to be late, call

Everyone, including the head honcho of a company, should be respectful of other people's time, Robinson said.

"In this age of all this wizardry and electronics we have, it's easy to get in contact with people," she said. "If you're going to be late, call."

Making somebody wait and not giving them an estimated time of arrival is not only unprofessional, it's rude.