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Others will appreciate your table manners

BY JILL HANEY • ENQUIRER CONTRIBUTOR • FEBRUARY 14, 2010

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Over the past few weeks, I've dined out a bit more than usual, which is neither good for my wallet nor my waistline, but it is good for observing dining etiquette.

Because dining etiquette is a key skill needed in business, let's take a minute to review what not to do, starting with Rule No. 1: Do not draw unwanted attention to yourself.

With that in mind:

Don't berate the waiter or bartender if the restaurant does not have the wine that you like to drink. The wait staff doesn't pick the beverages the restaurant offers, they just serve them. Our true character can often be revealed by the way we treat people waiting on us. Besides, I bet the bartender could offer a great substitute if given the opportunity.

Take care to not make noise when your silverware hits the plate, and don't stab your food. Yes, it's already dead and the resulting stabbing and squeaking noise is like fingernails on the chalkboard, sending shivers down the spines of your dining partners.

Avoid shoveling food. It's a faux pas to bring your face to the plate. It's much more civilized to sit up straight and bring the food to you. Also, there's no need to guard your plate with your nondominant hand.

Skip the clanking and clinking of glasses and mugs when adding cream or sugar to drinks. I caught myself doing just that the other morning with my coffee, and I annoyed myself. Imagine how annoying it must be to those around us.

And please, please, please do not walk around sucking on a toothpick. It draws unwanted attention and grosses out the people around us. It is quite gauche. Toothpicks serve a purpose, just not in our mouths when out in public.

We all want to be memorable, but let's not be memorable for unseemly dining habits. It would be better for all of us if we were memorable for our business acumen and the fact that we know how to sit up straight, keep elbows off the table, chew with mouth shut and refrain from talking with mouth full.

Cincinnati-based JH Image Consulting conducts individual and corporate consulting on appearance, behavior, communication and etiquette. Reach her at 513-505-2732, jill@jhimage.net or www.jhimage.net.

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