

FIRST BUSINESS

Adults lacking social graces flock to etiquette courses

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CHICAGO -- You're at lunch, trying not to embarrass yourself in front of your boss. But you can't remember: Is that your bread plate or the boss' on the left? Where do you put your napkin when you go powder your nose? Is it OK to lick the hollandaise from your knife?

The answers: It's yours. On your chair. And no, never.

From Chicago to New Orleans and from East Coast to West, adults are paying good money for the answers to these and other **etiquette** questions.

Americans lacking the social graces -- and the experts say there are plenty in this age of declining civility -- are signing up to learn their manners.

Gloria Petersen, who has been teaching **etiquette** in the Chicago area since 1989, mostly at corporate seminars, said business has doubled in the last three years. "People are tired of being boorish," she said.

For \$495 for a day of one-on-one instruction -- or \$2,000 for a group of up to 50 -- Petersen will instruct people in the finer points of introductions, toasts and dining. Her clients range from their early 20s to their 50s.

It's money well spent, said Tim Janisch, a human resources executive at LaSalle Northwest National Bank who has sent 60 people to charm school for grown-ups.

"A lot of our younger employees will be well-equipped with book knowledge, sales skills and computer skills, but what we find they lack is social grace. The reality is that it does still matter," he said.

Paul Doyle, assistant director of the masters of business program at Loyola University, said if only he had taken Peterson's course sooner, he would have been spared embarrassment at a black-tie fund-raiser.

As he recalled it, he turned to speak to a dining companion and the waiter tried to take his plate before he had finished eating.

"I was constantly fighting with waitstaff who wanted to take my plate away because I misplaced my utensils," he said. "I learned there is a language or a signal system."

(When finished eating, place your knife and fork at the 4:20 position.)

Randy Cross, who owns an executive placement company in Schaumburg, sends all his clients for lessons on such things as how to dress, carry themselves, present business cards and shake hands.

"It's so hard to get a good, high-paying job outside of a technical job, you need every edge you can get," he said. "Why jeopardize an important career move like that by some annoying mannerism that you aren't aware of?"

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