Your Professional Image: 
Secrets of the Unwritten Rules

An advanced degree can put your career in the fast lane. Yet you can bring your career prospects to a screeching halt if you haven’t mastered some of the skills expected in a professional environment.

“Only 15% of your success is based on your education and skill,” says Mary Lee Kennedy, founder and president of Houston-based MannersPro. “The other 85% is based on your people skills.”

As she helps college students, young adults, professionals and ESL students learn those people skills, Kennedy emphasizes manners.

“Having good manners is not about which fork to use,” she explains. “It is all about making other people feel more comfortable around you. You can do that by behaving in a predictable way, and by treating everyone equally and with respect. One good way to learn the unwritten rules of professional behavior is to observe successful professionals and find one to mentor you.”

Avoid self-sabotage
First impressions are important whether you’re meeting professors, employers or colleagues. While the way you dress can influence how someone sizes you up, it’s often the way you behave that creates a more lasting positive or negative impression.

Baby boomer and businessman Barry Foster spends a considerable amount of time on college campuses. “I tend to be conservative in my appearance, wearing a tie and jacket and carrying a briefcase,” says the director and founder of the Corporate Coaching Center in St. Petersburg.

“The young adults who act and speak to me as though I was one of their long-time, millennial buddies ‘sabotage’ their initial impression with me. I’m very open and fully appreciate the youth of today; however, it’s very hard to get a second chance to make a first impression. How do I decide whether or not to take them seriously? It’s not how they’re ‘packaged’—it’s how I’m treated.”

Observe others’ styles
Seek to understand other people’s personality styles and preferences, then respond in-kind, recommends Michele Norris, president of Navigen Leadership, LLC in Tampa.

“There’s no one-size-fits-all approach to success. For example, learn what modes of communication people prefer, whether that’s in-person, phone, voice mail, email or text message. Then respect that preference.”

“We all see the world through our own filter and view others in our own image,” Foster adds. “Be aware of others’ styles, mannerisms, speech, attire, conversational speed, words and phrases.”

Excerpted with permission from www.mannerspro.com

Etiquette Q & A

Q: Whose name is mentioned first in an introduction?
A: The person you are honoring or the eldest, highest ranking official.

Q: What is the correct response to thank you?
A: You’re welcome.

Q: Is email always appropriate?
A: No. There are times when a handwritten note will make all the difference.

Q: If you’re stuck with a “boring” individual at a party, what should you do?
A: Introduce them to someone else.

Q: If served appetizers from a server’s tray, how many should you take?
A: One if you have a napkin, two if you have a plate.

Q: What would you do if your nose starting running during dinner?
A: Use a tissue or handkerchief, never the napkin.

Q: If you drop a utensil on the floor in a restaurant, should you pick it up?
A: No.

Q: In a restaurant, how can you tell when a dinner meeting is over?
A: When the corporate host asks for the check or crumples up their napkin.

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The Health Enhancement for Lifelong Professional Students program can assist when you’re not sure where to turn. HELP$ is available for you 24/7: 813-870-0184
Why Adults Need to Play

What do you do, just for fun? Play time isn’t just for children. Adults need time to relax, laugh, let go of worries and let creativity flow. Doing something completely unrelated to school or work is the key. Give yourself ‘recess’ time for healthy play and you’ll be more stress-proof.

“We work to make money. We play to enjoy life,” says USF alumna Beth S. Miller, Communication Gardener. “From the time my husband and I married, we’ve made up our own games for car rides, the dinner table and to get through tough times.”

“While we don’t necessarily schedule play, it always finds its way into our day,” says Miller. “We recently bought a small fishing boat, strictly for play. We’ve had some adventures with it. Like not taking the straps off the boat to get it off the trailer. Or passing up 15 bait shops before picking the one boat ramp with none. And then finally getting the boat into the water on the first try, only to have the steering go out. Still, we always find things to laugh about.”

Need to pump a little more fun into your frantic life? These books will get the ideas flowing.