

Help Henry!

Written by L.A. Plume
Tuesday, 24 May 2011 14:30



Dear Readers,

The concept of etiquette, like everything else, has changed since Emily Post had the good sense to tell us how to behave properly in polite society. Texting at the table, talking on cell phones while waiting in line, talking with your mouth full of food, and ignoring service people will never, ever be acceptable etiquette. But a huge segment of the population just doesn't care, so what can you do? Originally, etiquette was a complicated dance that defined class structure and put, and kept, people in their "proper place." Back in the day, at a fancy dinner party, a waiter would stand behind you, serve from the left and clear from the right; they were to be invisible and you acted just as though they were. No one would dream of stacking used dinner plates and scraping them off at the table before clearing. Heavy linen tablecloths and napkins were starched and ironed, dinner plates were rimmed with 24 carat gold and had to be washed by hand. Real silverware was used and came in sizes and shapes only a mathematician or experienced hostess could understand. It was polished before setting the table, and counted before being put away (no wonder as a five piece place setting costs upward of \$1500).

Now, it seems the best we can generally hope for is civility and reasonably good manners. The bottom line is making people feel good in almost any situation. You know not to ever tell someone that their behind looks enormous in that bathing suit, when they ask. Fibbing is not only allowable in etiquette, it is required. You, hopefully, won't say, "Bertha, your butt looks like the back of a Greyhound bus, I hope you won't be mistaken for a whale at the beach." Instead, "Darling, your delicious full figure is quite womanly and will allow us not to have to take an extra

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cushion upon which to sit on the bleachers.” See how easy it is? Look at it as a means to be creative. You may even be self-deprecating, if it will suit the purpose.

Henry asked me what he can do when he is at work and people come to his counter and are talking on their cell phones while making their requests. Someone suggested that he just to ignore them until they're finished with their call. That works, but may back up the line. “Please step aside until you are ready to give me your full attention,” is a thought, but not much fun. If you have to “educate” people in how to treat you respectfully, you might as well either enjoy it, or make a game of it, until you find a solution. Let's all get together, write in, and give Henry some suggestions. I'm all for: “I'm deaf and can only read lips, so if you want to discuss sex on a first date instead of the bottle of aspirin that I'm selling, I suggest you get off the phone.” Or: “I have anger management issues and if you continue to talk on the phone at my counter I'm going to start shouting obscenities at you because you are really annoying me.” Or he could give them a box of Depends instead of that aspirin, smile sweetly when they object, and say, “Sorry, I couldn't understand you while you were talking to someone else.” Come on readers, join in the game - let's have fun with this and help Henry.

L. A. Plume

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