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 Previous **Article 1 of 1** Next

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Minding our manners

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By Samantha Meinke

GLWoman

Julie **Duke** and her friend Donna **Ullrich** got tired of watching bad behavior. "We just got talking one day about how we were seeing more and more people who were simply rude to one another," **Duke** says. "It just seems to us that civility has sort of been pitched out the window in our culture. It was something we felt was too important to ignore."

So they're doing something about it. **Duke** attended the Protocol School of Washington, where courses are taught by the state department. **Ullrich** attended the Etiquette and Leadership Institute. Together they founded Protocol Consulting Group LLC in Okemos. "We're really hoping we can provide the kind of training we don't see is available around here," **Duke** says. "We're very interested in putting classes together for children. We're also very interested in working with universities in helping their students get ready to go out in the job market with interview techniques and basic manners."

GLWoman: What is etiquette?

Duke : At its very core, etiquette is about showing respect to other people. It's about following a certain set of guidelines that has been created over hundreds of years to help people function better in the world.

GLWoman: How is etiquette valuable?

Duke : It just makes everything easier. If you follow the rules, not only do you yourself know how to behave, but you know what to expect from other people. There aren't insulting, embarrassing moments. There aren't situations where you're unaware you just made a huge faux pas. If you show respect to other people and grant them the courtesy you expect, they meet you halfway. They want to be around you. You don't make them uncomfortable. And when you know how to behave, you have a self-confidence and you can concentrate on the business at hand.

GLWoman: How can it hurt to not know proper etiquette?

Duke : You only have to think about how we perceive people who are behaving badly in public. You have between three and five seconds to make a first impression on someone. That kind of instantaneous assessment is based not only on your physical appearance, but also on your bearing, your self-confidence, the look in your eye and your handshake. It's about the whole package.

GLWoman: Do you specialize in any particular sort of etiquette?

Duke : Part of my training was studying international business protocol. With the advent of the Internet, it's very easy for people to find information about other cultures. But we find it's more cost-effective and time-efficient to just sit down with another person, and we can just sift through all

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the information and provide a cheat sheet for people who need to talk on the phone overseas or do business with people in another country. The phrase ugly American has been around for as long as I remember, and most of the time it's not that people are purposefully behaving badly, they just don't know any better.

GLWoman: What did you do in Washington, D.C., for 10 years?

Duke : I worked at the Kennedy Center for several years and then the Shakespeare Theater. In Washington, it's particularly interesting because protocol is so important there, and you have to appreciate the importance of ambassadors and senators versus anyone else. You have to understand where they should be seated and how they should be addressed, and as Americans, we're not used to that. But it's very basic protocol.

Section: GLWoman GLW

Page: 94TAB

Record Number: lan51240411

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