

## **Holiday Guest Etiquette Tips**

In the whirlwind of holiday activities there are challenges enough on a checklist full of schedule juggling, decorating, gift giving, baking and celebrating. Your behavior at holiday gatherings shouldn't be among those challenges. To move confidently as a guest through holiday events give the following helpful tips a try.

Oh, and remember, your host invited you for a purpose --- to enjoy your company or to get to know you better. That invitation comes with responsibilities, the most important of which is that you actively participate with your host and other guests to ensure the gathering's success.

### **The Office Party**

The holiday office party typically has two purposes: first, to provide the staff with an opportunity to celebrate the season and second, to recognize their work over the year. With this in mind, it is important for workers to remember this golden rule: Don't do anything you don't want your co-workers or boss to remember tomorrow.

Moderation is the key for the professional who wants his/her reputation intact after the party. Specifically, don't use the office party as your outlet to let loose this holiday season. Keep the purpose of the party in mind and make socializing the priority and drinking secondary.

When you arrive, greet your hosts and thank them for their invitation. Make a point of thanking them again as you are leaving. Neither of these actions replaces the handwritten thank-you note sent after the party, which is still appropriate and will be appreciated. Your thank-you note will impress your hosts since so few individuals extend their thanks in this way.

Attendees should carefully consider their attire for the office party and follow traditions or suggestions offered by organizers. Keeping in mind the morning after, men and women should maintain their professional style, avoiding anything more relaxed than business casual unless encouraged by hosts. If women choose to move away from business attire to a dressier cocktail hour style, they should remember that this is still a business event. Cleavage and too much skin remain inappropriate in the professional work environment. With that in mind, women should consider whether the work party is the proper place for their most revealing dresses. Save those clothes for other social events during the season.

### **The Private Dinner**

At a private party, the hosts have clearly invited you because they enjoy your company and want others to know you as well. Your responsibility here is to ensure the success of the evening by actively participating.

Always greet your hosts when you arrive. When you leave, thank them for your invitation. A gift of wine, flowers, or food remains an appropriate small gift of appreciation for the host. None of these relieves you of your duty to send a handwritten thank-you note after the dinner. If your hosts include an R.S.V.P. in their invitation, be sure to respond in a timely fashion whether you will be attending or not. Your response may be offered in writing or over the telephone.

Before dinner, make a point of meeting and talking with all of the guests. At dinner, if you are seated around a table, you are responsible for engaging those guests seated to your left and right in conversation. Follow the lead of your host when it comes to starting and finishing the meal. If you pick up an item of food to pass at the table, offer it first to the guest on your left before helping yourself. If dinner is served buffet style, engage those guests who are within a 5-foot radius of you and you will find yourself in a very enjoyable and social dining experience.

Gentleman will help seat those ladies who are near and will stand when ladies leave or return to the table.

Unless your hosts indicate otherwise, it is best to dress up for such gatherings. Leave your jeans and sports clothes at home and dress as you would for church or the theatre. Your attire signals your respect for your hosts.

Finally, unless your hosts have included additional guests in your invitation, do not bring others with you.

### **Gift Giving and Thank You's**

Contrary to media messages and general belief, gifts do not come with the expectation that the recipient owes the giver one in return. The recipient needs only to accept the gift with a gracious "thank you."

In the work environment, it is generally accepted that employers may give gifts to employees but employees are not expected to reciprocate.

Gifts demonstrate the importance of the recipient to the giver. In return, the recipient demonstrates his/her appreciation for the gift with an expression of thanks. While saying "thank you" at the time the gift is received is natural, our etiquette tradition still requires a written "thank you" within 24 hours of receiving the gift.

With the advent of the computer and email the handwritten thank-you note is even more memorable and appreciated these days. Debate rages over the appropriateness of emailed "thank you's." In the world of etiquette, an emailed "thank you" is acceptable but considered ordinary. To be extraordinary, handwrite your thank-you notes and encourage the children in your family to try it as well.

### **Give it a Try**

We know that you are familiar with most of the etiquette tips we have provided. You've just gotten rusty about using them. Tuck these suggestions into your holiday survival kit and you won't be worrying about any embarrassing social faux pas. Then relax and enjoy the people and the events that are part of your holiday celebrations this year. We send our best wishes to you for a season of great fun!