

## THE VANCOUVER SUN

Vancouver Sun

August 9, 2011

**Social graces smooth the way during business meals; Why it's important to know the restaurant staff, and why your guest always receives the best seat at the table**

Darah Hansen

<http://www.vancouversun.com/life/Social+graces+smooth+during+business+meals/5226664/story.html>

**Social graces smooth the way during business meals; Why it's important to know the restaurant staff, and why your guest always receives the best seat at the table**

By Darah Hansen, Vancouver Sun August 9, 2011



**Protocol coach Carey McBeth is also the etiquette trainer for Simon Fraser University and UBC, where she teaches business students how to impress in the professional world.**

**Photograph by: Wayne Leidenfrost, PNG, Vancouver Sun**

Carey McBeth is, at first, loath to take the seat facing the main windows at the Tableau Bar Bistro in downtown Vancouver, but the photographer is adamant. He needs the natural light.

"If my teacher ever saw this, I'd get in trouble," she jokingly protests as she glides her slender frame around the neatly set table to settle in at the back bench in polite compliance with the request.

"The guest always takes the best seat."

And, with that, we already have lesson one in McBeth's basic etiquette class for business people.

McBeth is an eager teacher. For the past eight years, she has built a career around etiquette after training as an instructor at The Protocol School of Washington, in Washington, D.C.

In Vancouver, she's helped to sharpen the professional image of clients ranging from the ambitious cubicle dweller to the savvy boardroom big-wig.

She's also the etiquette trainer for both Simon Fraser University and UBC, where she works with business undergraduate and graduate students alike.

Everyone is looking for that competitive edge.

"People don't want to be seen as not knowing," she says.

Just how important are table manners when it comes to an individual's business success?

"Critical," McBeth says. "We all know that when you first meet someone you will be judged within the first five seconds. ... Old-fashioned people skills are 85 per cent of the reason someone will get a job, be promoted in a job, and keep a job. Technical skill counts for only about 15 per cent."

She estimates about 60 per cent of all business is conducted over a meal - whether it's a coffee and Danish with the boss, or a sit-down at a formal restaurant with a client.

Whatever the situation, she feels it's important to be prepared to be evaluated not just on one's skill and experience, but on how one eats and the attention paid to details.

On this day, McBeth has agreed to meet The Sun at Tableau to share some of the essential "do's" and "don't s" of navigating a business luncheon.

At right is her Top-10 list.

#### HOW TO WIN FRIENDS AND INFLUENCE PEOPLE

Here's a top-10 list of dos and don'ts to help you impress the boss when you next meet over a crumbly croissant:

Rule 1: Do your homework:

The host - the person who extends the invitation - has the responsibility of choosing the restaurant and setting the time.

It's important to inquire in advance if your guest has any dietary preferences or restrictions.

"Ask them directly, or their assistant, if there is something they don't or won't eat," McBeth says.

Rule 2: Do choose your venue carefully:

McBeth recommends building a relationship with at least five restaurants, with varied menus and price points, well in advance of your meal.

Your guest will be impressed when you are personally greeted by the maitre d' and given the best table in the house without asking, she says.

Rule 3: Don't let your guest arrive before you: Fifteen minutes should be enough to introduce yourself to the front-of-house staff (if you don't already know them) and select the perfect table (one that is relatively private and away from distractions such as the kitchen, front door and bathrooms) before your guest arrives.

Rule 4: Do avoid challenging foods:

Spaghetti and meatballs? BBQ ribs? Forget it.

Stick to a dish that can be neatly and easily eaten with a knife and fork, and try to keep the same pace as everybody else.

"You are trying to establish a connection with your guest - jamming food in your mouth is counterproductive to why you are there," McBeth says.

Rule 5: Don't let your guest flounder:

If someone is having a hard time choosing something from the menu, offer a few suggestions. This will also provide a strong signal to how much money you are willing to spend on the meal.

Rule 6: Do turn off your mobile phone:

"The person in front of you always takes precedence over any technology. If you can't take the time to give your undivided attention to the individual you are with, you should not be there," McBeth says.

Rule 7: Do be mindful of time:

A meeting over coffee should last no longer than 30 minutes, while breakfast or lunch can run between 45 minutes to one hour.

Rule 8: Do keep political and religious opinions to yourself: It's your job to make your guest feel comfortable.

"The Canucks game is a typical [conversation starter] in Vancouver ... but the recent [Stanley Cup] riot might bring up a really negative feeling," McBeth says. "You want someone's experience in speaking with you to be all positive."

Rule 9: Don't over-indulge:

Alcohol isn't necessarily off the menu during a business lunch. It really depends on the person you are with and your company's corporate policy, McBeth says. If you do have a drink, stop at just one. "Make sure it doesn't flow so much that the situation starts to flow out of your hands because you've had too much," she says.

Rule 10: Don't let the bill hit the table:

As the host, it's your responsibility to cover all the costs associated with a business meeting - from the meal to the coat check to the valet parking, McBeth says.

Avoid potential awkwardness by privately arranging with the front-of-house staff in advance of the meal for the cheque to be held at the till. When the meal comes to a close, excuse yourself from the table and go take care of things.

"The whole purpose of the meeting is to show that you take care of the little things. It just gives you instant credibility," she says.

*Length: 1,024 words*