Guide to Business Etiquette

During the interview process, company recruiters are looking to hire intelligent, hard working, dedicated new employees. This includes hiring graduates with good social skills. Jeff B. Speck's article, Interviewing Etiquette states, "A sparkling GPA and extracurricular achievement will earn you an interview with most of the nation's top campus recruiters. But if you can't display proper social skills—I like to call it 'etiquette' your chances of making a good impression are nil."

Companies will typically host a lunch or dinner as a part of the second interview or site visit. Yet, the thought of dining in a business setting often sparks an array of questions or downright terror in job candidates. "What do I order?", and "Will I be judged on my table manners?" are just a few of the questions that perplex the student who is preparing for this experience.

Knowledge and preparation are key to a successful business dining experience. The following information and tips, developed with the input of recruiters, should address the questions and alleviate the stress so that students can focus their attention on the real purpose of the day—to sell themselves to the employer.

Attire

Most invitations to join a recruiter and/or company representative for lunch or dinner will be accompanied by general direction on expected attire. If the organization fails to communicate this information, it is acceptable to ask the recruiter. However, if the meal is scheduled as part of the interview, the candidate will wear their interview attire to the meal as well. Candidates are generally dressing for the interview rather than the meal itself. If there are any questions about what to wear, candidates will never go wrong with dressing in "business professional attire".

What to Order

Much of the "What should I order?" anxiety is eliminated right away because meals are often served in a company dining room where the menu is largely pre-determined. Recruiters favor a buffet because it provides some variety and works well with time constraints.

If this is not the case and a student finds him/herself struggling with a menu, follow a simple practice—let the host take the lead. Then, order in kind. If the host does not order first, the candidate may ask the host, "What do you recommend?" or "What do you typically enjoy here?" Candidates should select an item in the medium price range on the menu rather than the most expensive item.
Whether food selections come from a buffet or menu, always consider the type of food being ordered. Never order anything that is messy to eat, unfamiliar, or difficult to eat with a fork.

In addition, candidates are advised not to overindulge, but at the same time, not to skip the meal either. When a person just takes a few pieces of lettuce from the buffet, or two bites from their plate, it may signal that the person is not capable of handling the situation.

**Conversation**

Conversation can be the trickiest component of the company-hosted meal. In observing successful people, one will generally observe a common characteristic — they possess good interpersonal skills. Employers are looking for strong communication skills in the people they interview and the lunch or dinner is an excellent place to demonstrate these skills. Candidates should strive to come across as relaxed and friendly and should convey an interest in the company. The conversational tone should always be positive.

Generally, the topics of conversation should steer clear of personal matters and controversial topics such as religion and politics. Through conversation, candidates should express an interest in the position and department for which they are interviewing and discuss general topics related to the field or industry.

**Is This Really Part of the Interview?**

Answers to this question vary among companies and recruiters. Some say that the lunch/dinner is a time for the candidate to relax and ask questions about the organization such as what it's like to work there and what the people are like. The host for the meal is not asked for feedback on the candidate. On the other hand, some use the meal as another way to evaluate the candidate. They might look for the ability to interact in a group setting, which can provide insight into the person's potential as a team player.

All recruiters agree that table manners count. Even if candidates are not formally being evaluated on behavior, they are making an impression and they should make that impression a good one. Candidates are encouraged to take advantage of the" Business Etiquette Dinners" hosted on the Texas State campus.

**Some General Tips for Dining Etiquette**

- Be on time
- Turn off cellular phones and pagers
- When arriving at the door first, open the door for other people to follow
• Always stand during introductions
• Use full name when introducing yourself
• Address others by their title and last name
• Do not touch anything on the table until the host does
• Be sure to drink from your own water glass (it is on your right)
• Dab your mouth with your napkin several times during the meal
• Know which fork to use
• Never put a piece of used silverware directly on the table—put it on your plate
• In passing sugar, cream, bread, salt and pepper—offer to the left, then pass to the right
• Half way through the meal, offer bread again if it is in front of you
• Do not try to eat a cherry tomato or a pitted olive—leave them on the plate
• All wrappers are placed under the rim of the bread and butter plate or the meal plate
• Take three bites then rest your utensil on your plate; do not eat very much slower or faster than your host
• Leave yourself time to talk
• Cut one bite at a time and take small bites
• If you drop a utensil, ask a waiter to bring you another one—never bend over to pick up the dropped utensil
• When you are finished eating, place your utensils at the four o'clock position on your plate with the tines of the fork down
• If you have to leave your chair during the meal, move to the right and place your napkin in the seat of the chair
• Avoid alcohol at all times in an interview situation