

The Importance of Being Earnestly Courteous

When I was a little girl I loved reading my grandmother's signed copy of Emily Post's book on etiquette. My love of social graces continued through adulthood, and last summer while attending BlogHer, a conference for women bloggers, I was thrilled to meet Anna Post, the great-great granddaughter of my etiquette heroine.

We discussed the state of social civility in our ever-evolving world, and how etiquette serves a crucial function in the queer community. When she asked my advice on the proper way to introduce a trans-identified person, I knew this was a subject requiring further exploration.

After the conference I put away the idea of Queer Etiquette, but recent events have caused me to again consider its need. Why has it become so acceptable to behave in a manner that completely disregards common courtesy and appropriate conduct in social situations? Manners are not "old fashioned" and etiquette is important—not to restrict people's expression—but rather provide tools so that they may feel comfortable in any situation.

Etiquette goes beyond which fork to use at a fancy dinner or the correct wording when addressing an invitation. It's also about politeness and civility and how people's behavior reveals their character to others. The state of our present economy makes social graces as important as ever when attempting to make



LIVING OUT LOUD

by Kathryn Martini

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a positive impression while networking and job seeking. Unfortunately, it seems there are many who need to begin with the basics.

One person occupying multiple seats at a packed movie is not acceptable behavior. Setting up lawn chairs in front of someone at an outdoor concert is inconsiderate. Including a bank account number in a wedding invitation and requesting deposits in lieu of gifts is tactless. Wearing cargo shorts to a formal event

is uncouth, and conducting a long, loud and private cell phone conversation on the bus is disrespectful to those forced to listen. These are not extreme examples, sadly, but rather incidents I've had the recent displeasure of observing.

Being polite is very simple: treat others in a way you would like to be treated and consider how actions may come across to others as they form an opinion of you. Greet people with sincerity, be gracious and show appreciation. Hold the door for the person behind you, treat people who give you service with respect, give up your seat on the Max for a pregnant woman, and keep commitments that you make.

The queer community operates within society as a whole and is not given a pass on social civility. It is also important that we address the protocol for some of the unique situations that arise in our community, in order to teach others how to treat us. This includes having respect for how individuals identify and being mindful to use inclusive language and thought, paying close attention to use the name and pronoun with which he or she identifies unless otherwise specified.

We should take care not to make assumptions based on labels. Just because a woman has a girlfriend doesn't automatically make her a lesbian, and people shouldn't be pigeonholed by others on "what" or "how" they

fit under the rainbow. Traditional gender-role politeness needn't be abandoned just because we may not practice traditional gender roles in our relationships. I will often open a car door for my wife or place her order at a restaurant; I do so to show her the respect and attention she deserves.

Marriage equality will certainly add another dimension to queer etiquette as more couples marry and begin to have families. Stacy Jill-Jacobs is the founder of Queerlywed.com, a website dedicated to assisting couples planning their nuptials. When she and her fiancée became engaged they searched online for queer wedding guidance and couldn't find it. She believes many wedding traditions are evolving to accommodate queer couples, leaving people with questions on how to approach the big day.

These questions won't be answered overnight, and there isn't a queer version of Emily Post to act as authority—yet. In the meantime, we can try to remember that manners, like honesty and integrity, are not antiquated ideas but rather essential values designed and maintained for civility and decorum in society—both within and outside of our community. **JO**

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