



# Interviews: Table Manners

*Put your fork in your mouth at business lunches, not your foot.*

## Mind your Peas and Qs.

Job interviews are not limited to company board rooms or HR offices. In addition to phone conferences, employers also evaluate prospectives during business meals. More than just an opportunity to chat 'n' chew, these casual settings enable recruiters to assess a candidate's social and communication skills in a non-corporate environment. How you conduct yourself under pressure, including your table manners, indicates how you could potentially represent the company in a public forum, particularly in jobs where client interaction and PR are involved.

## Don't make it your last meal.

In business meal interviews, don't forget that only the location has changed. All other interview criteria remain in play. Your appearance, behavior, processing skills, and ability to communicate effectively are still being scrutinized. Good social skills can give you an advantage. If "clothes make the man," then behavior defines his character.

Manners are society's guidelines for establishing non-offensive behavior within a social context to keep everyone at ease. Remember, employers seek to hire a good fit for the "company," which BTW is derived from the Latin root for "together."

## Here's the dish on place settings.

Like any playing field, the dining table has its own set up and rules:

- bread plates are on the left. Put the butter on the plate first before buttering your bread;
- beverage glasses (wine, water) are to your right; the waiter will remove any you don't use;
- use utensils from the outside in: Salad fork, then dinner fork; soup spoon to teaspoon. When in doubt, observe others;
- place napkins on your lap, folded side towards you; dab your mouth, don't rub your face. If you get up, place the napkin to the left of your plate (to the right when finished eating) or on your seat. Often wait staff will refold it for you.

## How not to choke at a business meal.

Here are the basics for a business meal interview:

- check out the restaurant online ahead of time to familiarize yourself with the menu;
- wear proper business interview attire (see: "Dress for Success: Men/Women");
- greet or introduce yourself to others at the table; engage in pleasant conversation;
- **TURN OFF YOUR CELLPHONE!**
- don't order messy meals that risk dripping, spattering, or dissecting;
- don't order the most expensive dish;
- generally, follow the employer's/host's lead: sitting; placing the napkin on your lap; and when to begin eating;
- no alcohol; if pressed, order only one;
- tear off small pieces of bread to eat;
- don't chew with your mouth open, and swallow before speaking to avoid bad table manners, choking, or sharing oral projectiles;
- spoon your soup away from you: 6- to 12-o'clock, and tilt your bowl slightly away from you to finish;
- don't reach; ask for things to be passed. Pass salt and pepper together;
- remember Mom's words: sit up, don't slurp or burp, and elbows off the table;
- no finger lickin' goodness, or pickin' your teeth at the table — excuse yourself and go to the bathroom.
- when done, place fork and knife at a 10-4-o'clock position on your plate, tines down and blade towards you.

## Give thanks.

As with any other interview, be sure to send a thank you (see: "Interview: Thank You"). It's polite, reinforces your interest in the job, and puts your name in front of the employer.



## **i** n a nutshell:

Business meal interviews simply take place in a different venue. Basic interview rules still apply:

- **Wear proper interview attire**
- **Don't be late**
- **Turn off your mobile device**
- **Greet everyone and engage in polite conversation**
- **Follow the host's lead**
- **Avoid body noises, alcohol, and smoking**
- **Let the employer/host pay**
- **Send a thank you**

Remember, it's not about the food. It's about how you fit, so focus on creating a good impression.