

MANNERS

A MODERN FIELD GUIDE



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WHY GOOD MANNERS MATTER

D. Having beautiful manners is not about knowing how to seat a duke at lunch or what to wear for drinks at six, as opposed to dinner at eight. Good manners are not about being pretentious or excluding others via some sort of arcane salad-fork-based mystery code, and they are absolutely not about trying to catch people out. You are better than your place setting. In an increasingly ungracious world, good manners are about aspiring to graciousness and navigating a sometimes rocky path with ease, charm and a little élan.

Good manners are simply codified kindness, and being in possession of them enhances the quality of your everyday life and that of the people around you. It's not about drearily following rules. Rather, it's about feeling comfortable and at ease in any situation, and therefore being able to put others at their ease too. The aim is far from a tediously rigid formality, a glacial correctness or perfection. It is about running at life with a good heart and hoping to spread the joy, one (emailed) thank you note and cheerful dinner conversation at a time.

At home and abroad – often together – Kay and I have done the fieldwork, made the mistakes and committed enough embarrassing faux pas for two lifetimes, in the hope that you don't have to. We have honed our combined social wisdom into this guide to surviving modern life with your dignity intact, and perhaps having a bit (a lot) of fun along the way. I've always worked under the notion that manners are acts of kindness directed at strangers so that they will be nice in return. And I have done so for two reasons. First, different places have different

mores, so manners are necessarily adaptable. And second, I figure they work on a 'fool me once, more fool you' basis, to whit if I'm nice to you and you're a dick in return, that's your problem.

K. Manners are a social lubricant. They allow us to rub along. And people seem to have forgotten this. Somewhere along the way, an idea crept into society – that manners and politeness were somehow bourgeois and at odds with 'keeping it real'. This is shiny, patent-leather bullshit. Manners need to be reclaimed for what they are: social interactions that improve our daily lives.

However, since they are adaptable, malleable things, it stands to reason that our manners are not quite the same as our parents' manners. They are, as they should be, a little less formal, but still every bit as much a part of our everyday social transactions as ever they were.

(In using the word transaction, I'm reminded of a sign I saw recently in a French café. It read: 'Un café €6; Un café, s'il vous plaît €2,50; Bonjour, un café, s'il vous plaît €1,20.')

This book will hopefully provide you with a toolkit for life and help you negotiate modern society with kindness, sass and a modicum of grace. It's a guide to what's acceptable, what's intolerable, and what sort of behaviour should see someone first up against the wall come the Manners Revolution. In short, it shows how manners maketh man. And woman.



"Can you two keep it down-
I'm trying to work!"

DIGITAL DECORUM

D. Modern life is loud. It beeps, it vibrates, it alerts, it rings and bings. Increasingly, in our work-anywhere culture, the difference between public and private spaces has been eroded. It can be exhausting.

For your own safety and sanity, it's important to think about your tone, volume and content. It is terrifyingly easy to get carried away and it can land you in career- and relationship-ending hot water if you aren't careful.

Online communication certainly gets a bad press – the trolls, the hate tweeting, the surprise dick pics – but it can also open up your life in a wonderful way. I first got to know Kay on Twitter, quite a while before I met her in the flesh. And now look at us... cooking together, chatting on the phone together (though this is not my preferred form of communication, see page 00), holidaying together and even writing a book together. It all started with 140 characters or fewer (yes, I know it's 280 now – this shows how olden-days it was).

Slow down, take a breath. It is possible to navigate these choppy digital waters and the constant flow of information with your sanity intact.

EMAILS

It's so easy to communicate now, but just because you can doesn't mean you should. Sometimes it's worth thinking, if I had to type it, print it out, put it in an envelope, find a stamp and put it in a post box, would I? If you decide, yes I would, here are a few things to bear in mind.

- DON'T be inappropriately informal with people you don't know. 'Hi there!' is no way to greet a stranger from whom you want something.
- DO be careful with humour when communicating with people

TEXTING, DMS AND OTHER PRIVATE MESSAGES

This can sometimes be where there is a crossover between work and personal messages. What might feel like humour to you might be offensive to other people. Err on the side of extreme caution, unless you know the other person very well. Also, never assume that what you say in these messages will remain private.

Murder She Twote

I have seen so many people ruin their careers, relationships, lives with a single, ill-considered tweet. Think carefully. Don't say anything online that you wouldn't say to someone's face.

In our house, we remind each other that there are things you think but should not tweet. Breathe deep and step away from the computer.

Don't Enter into a Digital Fight to The Death

Don't send rude or aggressive emails or texts and do not reply to any you receive. I refer you to, 'Why don't you and I speak again when you feel better' (page 00).

Ditto Tweeting. I have seen so many angry tweets and subtweets out there that make me cringe for those individuals. Just stay calm. I remember a fellow model agent, an American in Paris called Robert, who used to say to stressed and angry colleagues, 'Calm down, it's only fashion. We're not curing cancer, kid'. This definitely applies to social media.

Miss Manners Has Left the Group

Don't add people to WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger groups without asking first; if you do, don't be offended if they leave. Modern life is noisy. Someone you have never met probably isn't that interested in your lunch.

HOLD THE LINE, CALLER

I sometimes picture Kay making her morning phone calls in a bejewelled turban and a marabou bed jacket, propped up on satin pillows, her scarlet fingernails cradling the receiver like a Fifties starlet.

Kay loves the phone. I hate the phone. When mine rings, I react as if a gun has gone off. Of course, I use the phone for work all the time but I am not one who calls just for a chat. My phone-a-friend list is vanishingly small.

It helps to know what kind of person you're dealing with before you dial.

- If you're beginning a work or personal relationship with someone, ask how they prefer to communicate. Do they prefer text, email or phone calls?
- Always ask, 'Is this a good time to talk?', especially when calling someone's mobile. Don't be offended if people say no, just set a convenient time to call back. Your priority isn't necessarily the other person's priority.
- Keep your mailbox greeting short. Say any numbers or key information slowly and clearly and save any jokes for your stand-up routine.
- When leaving messages, be brief. Don't ramble. Say your number very clearly and slowly – because we say our own numbers frequently, there can be a tendency to rattle them off fairly unintelligibly. State a time when you will call back or ask them to return the call by a certain time, if possible.

When I was an agent, the phone was key to all our negotiations as well as chasing down errant models. I am so old that, when I started in the business, we didn't even have computers. So, yes – I love to tap those numbers and speak to someone. I also think speaking to good pals on the telephone is a joy and something we don't do enough, Deb. Just saying.

But I agree with all comments above. And yes, of course I do my