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Business

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BUSINESS CASUAL

Pass the bread like a true professional

With the bulk of business conducted over meals, knowing what to do (and not to do) while colleagues is paramount.

BY WENDY DOSCHER-SMITH
Special to The Herald

On the afternoon before I headed to an assignment covering a business dining etiquette course, I brush up on my good manners. I called Sonia Jacobson, the etiquette expert who was hosting the inquire about the evening's dress code. Jacobson said business attire was required. When I explained from my home, she paused before adding, "Well, we always make exceptions for reporters."

Ouch.

Suffice it to say that I did not know exactly what to expect when I arrived at Bice, the Coconut Grove where the dinner was held. Who would attend? Hopeless slob? Stuck-up socialites? It was pouring late. I tiptoed into the tucked-away "wine room" with its elegant wood detailing and high-backed chairs a tight-lipped scolding but, to my relief, Jacobson could not have been more gracious as she welcomed

WORTH LEARNING

For the next few hours, the group of roughly 10 diners hung on Jacobson's every word, curious to clueless we really were. I had a lot to learn.

Considering that nearly 80 percent of all business is conducted over a meal, it made sense to set

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glazed grilled salmon and a serious lesson.

Who wants to lose a client because they passed the bread incorrectly (always pass to the right, p accidentally groped the customer while trying to clean up a stain on an outfit (offer to pay for the c instead)?

Jacobson's business, Distinguish Yourself, provides corporations and professionals with seminar: communication skills, business etiquette and international protocol. As part of her consulting busi plans to hold dinner-cum-etiquette seminars, like the one I attended, on a monthly basis. The cos multicourse meal and the lesson on the proper way to eat the meal.

As Jacobson, wearing a bright red blazer and black-rimmed glasses, presided over the group of t attorneys, artists and publishers, we huddled around a long rectangular table and watched as an projector spit out images of dining faux pas. We learned that blowing on soup, salting food before picking up a fork if you drop it in a restaurant aren't acceptable practices.

We also were instructed in such obvious no-nos as picking your teeth at the table, tucking your n: shirt or belt, drinking too much or trying to tackle a huge sandwich.

LITTLE-KNOWN

Other rules were more obscure. Who knew you must tip the sommelier separately? Or my persor way it goes in is the way it goes out." This rule applies to the unsightly business of removing trout such as fish bones, gristle and pits from your mouth.

The lessons were rolling along quite smoothly until a mini-debate began over whether it is approp beer from a bottle during dinner. On one side was Andrew Stark, publisher of The SunPost news; other, Coconut Grove-based attorney Jill Strommen.

Strommen was in favor. Stark, while admitting his position may be sexist, said he did not like won of bottles. Just as I was wondering what the etiquette was for busting up a fistfight, Jacobson mar the group with the words, ``Please start eating."

You don't know pressure until you are required to eat dinner during a business dining etiquette cl hope was that I was seated at the far end of the long table from Jacobson. Never had a Caesar s such a challenge.

DEDICATION

"Watch your posture at the table," said the voice from the other end of the table to no one in parti snapped up and put my phone on vibration mode. I began to carefully saw the lettuce, one bite at single pieces of bread and butter. I sipped my water with pinky tucked in and, when my grilled sal made sure not to cut it all up at once.

After the meal, I told Jacobson I had a great time. If she had had a sprig of spinach in her teeth -- not -- I surely would have told her, but only in the proper way: by whispering in her ear.

For more information on business etiquette dinners, contact Sonia Jacobson at 305-799-1299 or sj1299@bellsouth.net

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