

# QUESTION AND ANSWER WITH NATALIE GOKCHENIAN

## Etiquette and Presence



Natalie Gokchenian is the Manager, Executive Development, TD Bank Group and Founder of The School of Modern Etiquette. She is an accomplished communicator and has worked as a corporate spokesperson for some of Canada's largest brands including the Hudson's Bay Company, Winners and TD Bank Group.

As a journalism graduate of Ryerson University, Natalie started her career as a freelancer for the Toronto Star and worked as a reporter at the New York Times and Reuters. Eventually moving into public relations, Natalie has appeared on national outlets, such as Global News, Canada AM and Breakfast Television, as an expert in the retail industry.

In her spare time, she teaches Business Etiquette and Corporate Protocol in which she became certified at the Protocol School of Washington and through the University of Cambridge in the UK. She has facilitated etiquette training to some of Canada's largest corporations and universities.

### ■ How would you define modern etiquette?

Before I define modern etiquette, let me start by defining the term etiquette. Etiquette is mainly defined as the "code of behavior that delineates expectations for social behavior according to contemporary conventional norms within a society or group". That being said, when society evolves, so do the norms. Modern etiquette

is simple to define: "making yourself and others around you comfortable so that it brings the best out in people".

### ■ Where did etiquette start?

Many people think etiquette has its roots in England or France, but its history goes back to Ancient Egypt. In 2414 BC, Ptahhotep wrote 'The Maxims of Ptahhotep' which outlined civil virtues such as truthfulness, self-control, and kindness towards others. But the word *étiquette* is a French term which means label or sign. We use the term to refer to what is now social manners and graces because, as the story goes, King Louis XIV asked his gardener to put up signs (etiquettes) to avoid the palace Lords and Ladies from trampling on the grass in the Gardens of Versailles. That eventually evolved to rules on dressing, eating, and overall conduct of the high bourgeoisie. Over the years, etiquette gained immense popularity by advice columns and books on the topic.

### ■ How has etiquette evolved in most recent years?

Most recently, people used to attend courses (often called finishing school) and etiquette became a bad word. It became a reflection of the outward adoption of the superficial mannerisms of an in-group in the interests of social advancement rather than a concern for others. Etiquette has evolved and is now an important part of the corporate world including the recruitment process, networking and overall business conduct in the workplace.

What top tips would you provide to someone who is entering the corporate world for the first time?

**“Etiquette has evolved and is now an important part of the corporate world including the recruitment process, networking and overall business conduct in the workplace”**

What I typically teach Millennials during my Social Media Etiquette courses is:

1. Do a scrub of your profile on Google to see what comes up with your name. You can be certain employers will be checking to see what pops up about you in an online search. If you see anything that would hinder your prospects of getting the job (pictures you don't want online, blog posts you would like removed, etc.), take it down yourself or contact the administrator of the site immediately.
2. Ensure that you have an online presence such as a LinkedIn account which provides a high-level summary of your career to-date. Not having a social media presence these days is as dangerous as having those photos you don't want seen made available. Employers want to ensure you are using all the current social networking tools.
3. Make sure you incorporate some "traditional" actions during the recruitment process such as leaving a hand-written thank you note with the receptionist on your way out from your interview. In this digital age, it will make you stand out from the crowd.

### ■ Do you have any tips for networking at an event?

You should always build your network before you actually need to use it. Otherwise, it's too late. Many people think they've had a successful night of networking when they've handed out the stack of cards in their pocket. It's not the case. Always focus on meeting only 2-3 new people at an event.

**"You should always build your network before you actually need to use it"**

You will make more of a connection with someone with whom you've chatted for longer than 5-10 minutes. Also try to work the "singles" in the room. They're usually the ones standing up against the wall waiting for someone to talk to them. Avoid approaching people who are talking in groups of two's. They may be engaged in conversation that is private in nature. Stick with singles or groups of three's.

### ■ What advice do you have for corporate dress?

I've always liked that old adage that says "Dress for the job you want, not for the job you have." I've never heard of anyone being called out for being overdressed, but underdressed can be a career-limiting move. The key to business wear is to be conservative and non-distracting, but that doesn't mean boring. You can still let your personality shine through your accessories or colour choices. But at the end of the day, you are an ambassador for your company. Dress as you would if you were going to be called to an emergency meeting with the President every day and who knows, it might just happen one day!

### ■ What's your biggest pet peeve?

This is no brainer for me: cell phone use! I have to say that people have evolved to completely disregard discretion when using mobile phones and I know I'm not alone when I say this. We see people in meetings on their BlackBerrys completely ignoring the speaker at the front of the room and others who try to distance themselves to speak "privately" by walking away by two feet thinking you won't hear the conversation. I really miss phone booths and wish someone would bring them back for cell phones!

### ■ What book would you recommend as the ultimate etiquette guide?

Believe it or not, it's not really an etiquette book, but it taught me the most valuable lesson of all. Dale Carnegie's book "How to Win Friends and Influence People" has been at the top of my reading list for years and it was originally published in 1936. It nails down one message that has etiquette written all over it: Make the person you are talking to feel like they are the most important person in the world and do it sincerely. Remember that tip at every interaction and you will go places.