

# The Business Protocol Advantage— 9 Ways to Polish Your Professional Image

By Marta Wilson, PhD with Sharon Conti, PhD

For my ninth birthday, I received a set of books from my parents. It was The Random House Hostess Library featuring a cook book and an etiquette manual. Along with the gift, my mother offered a bit of advice: “Marta, you should know how to cook even if you choose not to do it, and you must learn good manners because using them is never your choice; it’s your responsibility.” I began reading both books right away. Mom was right. Cooking was fun, and protocol proved critical to my success in business. Although a few things have changed since I read my first etiquette guide, protocol has yet to go out of style, especially in work settings.

According to Dorothea Johnson, director of the Protocol School of Washington, the word “protocol” is derived from two Greek words, *protos* means “the first” and *kolla* means “glue.” *Protocollum* originally referred to a sheet of paper glued to the front of a document giving it authenticity. By the 19th century, the French term “*protocole diplomatique*” referred to the body of ceremonial rules observed in all official interaction between heads of state or their ministers. Today, protocol serves as the code of international politeness that blends ceremony, etiquette, and diplomatic form.

In business arenas, the term protocol is often used instead of etiquette because it sounds more professional. Many companies have established their own rules of protocol as part of their culture to ensure smooth daily operations and to provide a competitive advantage. In researching his book *Live for Success*, John Molloy found 99 out of every 100 executives said social skills were prerequisites to succeeding in business, indicating one must have suitable table manners, know how to carry on polite conversation, be able to introduce people without falling all over oneself, and be aware of simple rules of courtesy.

*Small things matter.* Nowhere does this hold more truth and power than in the world of business—where little niceties and social amenities can mean the difference between simply existing and gaining the edge necessary to excel in today’s fiercely competitive environment. Many people don’t understand exactly how much little things count until they ignore them and suffer the consequences—everything from embarrassment to reassignment to job loss. It is no exaggeration to say that business protocol can influence your success dramatically. Being courteous, polite, and pleasant will take you far in your profession just as being critical or negative will be a roadblock. Read on to discover

nine tips (borrowed from the resources listed on page 14 of this article) that can help you be a business protocol star.

## One: Master Handshakes and Other Greetings

*Be easy to meet and greet.*

- Keep your right hand free.
- If you’re asked to prepare your own name tag, be sure to print your name (especially your first name) in large, legible letters.
- When wearing a name tag, place it on your right side. That way, those shaking hands with you will be able to glance down at your name tag as you are introducing yourself.

*Shake hands.* Touching, patting, and kissing don’t cut it. Stick with a handshake. Generally speaking, a handshake should last only as long as it takes to greet the person. It should be firm enough to display your sense of confidence without being a bone crusher. Although men and women have shared the business arena for many years, some men are reluctant to extend their hands to a woman unless she first extends her hand. Unless you’re rebuffed by a particular individual who indicates she doesn’t wish to shake your hand, disregard this once-proper guideline and extend your hand to greet a business associate without regard to gender.

*Think of a web.* You shake from the elbow, not from the wrist and not from the shoulder. If you look at your hand and think of a web between your thumb and index finger, it should meet the other person’s web. That’s a good way to prevent someone from giving you a wimpy handshake. Give a couple of shakes—two, three, four—and make eye contact. Avoid quick, fluttery handshakes that indicate you’re unsure of yourself. If you grasp at fingertips or extend only a small portion of your hand, the entire greeting is clumsy. You may have to work for several minutes to reach a comfortable rapport which could otherwise have been established quickly with a firm and well-timed handshake.

*Smile.* It sends others a message of acceptance. A smile really is worth a thousand words—maybe even more. When you see someone smiling at others, you see a person with self-confidence, a person with the self-assurance to greet and accept others with finesse and poise.

*Lean in.* Although you both smile and share a firm handshake, the act of pulling away suggests something is amiss. If it happens to you more than once, make sure you don't have an unpleasant body odor that prompts others to step back. Powerful perfume odors or tobacco residue can also be culprits.

*Make eye contact.* The importance of this rule can't be overemphasized. Looking someone directly in the eye will accomplish three things: You will project an image of self-confidence and a healthy self-esteem; you will be perceived as a good listener; and you will probably receive the same courtesy when you speak. This behavior rounds out the greeting and takes the stiffness out of the ritual. More importantly, it announces you're giving the individual your complete attention.

*Say your name.* If you're meeting someone for the first time, introduce yourself using your first and last name. If you have met the person previously but suspect he or she may not remember your name, eliminate potential embarrassment by reintroducing yourself. You might say something like, "I'm Sharon Flinder. We met at last year's conference. It's so nice to see you again."

*Stand up or do the bob.* When you are seated and someone approaches you to say "hello", stand up, whether you are a man or woman. By doing so, you show the person you are giving him or her your full attention. What if you're scrunched in a booth or in another situation that makes it difficult or impossible to stand up? Then do the bob. In other words, simply make an effort to stand. When you do so, the person who has approached you will motion to you to stay seated. At least, let's hope so!

## Two: Be a Magnificent Mingler

*Scan the room and be proactive.* When you walk into a room, pause to survey the room to give yourself time to make a note of who you want to meet and talk to, and a moment to compose yourself. Be willing to make the first move. Remember, most people are friendly once you start talking with them.

*Move around.* Never stay with one person too long. By the time you leave, connect in a small way with everyone in that room. This makes everyone feel important. The key to working a room is not being shy. To overcome shyness, remember people like to talk about themselves, so ask "What's your name?", "What do you do?", "Where do you live?"

*Avoid the food.* Don't stand near the food. Don't eat a lot. If you can't manage food, drink, and mingling, omit the food. Remember you can always eat later. Don't show up hungry, especially if you are drinking.

*Be polite.* Shake hands to meet new people and to renew acquaintances. Don't assume you may automatically call someone by his/her first name. Keep your eyes on the person you're talking to. Don't look around the room. You don't want to monopolize the conversation. Remember that building a relationship often begins by expressing a genuine interest in others, and you can often do this by letting the other person speak. When it's time to move on, all you need to say is, "It was wonderful talking to you!"

*Make small talk.* Small talk does not mean unimportant or silly. This is simply conversation about everyday happenings—the weather, sports, your immediate environment, etc. Think of small talk as a gateway to new relationships and maintaining the old ones. The advantage of making small talk is that everyone is able to participate. Thus, when establishing rapport with someone, begin with small talk. Once you get started, keep the conversation going by referring to the last time the two of you were together, discussing items of interest to the other person, or asking questions to draw the other person out.

*Have interesting topics to discuss.* Read the newspaper, watch the news, or simply observe the world around you for interesting topics. You can also plan an opening line to get a conversation going with just about anyone by using: the environment you are in - "The speaker was excellent. Have you heard him before?"; a self-revelation - "I saw the new movie last night. Have you had a chance to see it?"; or a sincere compliment - "The presentation by your group was excellent."

*Be willing to reveal yourself.* You need to reveal yourself, at least a little bit. You can share personal information, such as you just started graduate school; that is fine. But explaining that you were rejected at three schools and finally got the money together to attend is not necessary to share. Don't get too personal too quickly.

*Take a risk.* If as a guest you find yourself on the sidelines, don't be embarrassed to introduce yourself to someone. The easiest way to join a group is to walk past and listen to the topic. If the subject is politics, sports, computers, the state of the economy, or any other subject of an impersonal nature, you've found a conversation anyone could join. Wearing a pleasant look, make eye contact with one or two people and listen to what's being said. Be patient, and eventually you'll be asked to join in. If a private or personal topic is the subject or the discussion is about people you don't know, move on. Likewise, if people engaged in a perfectly innocuous conversation make no move to invite you in, try another group. There is no reason to take this personally. They may be so caught up in their subject they simply fail to notice you.

## Three: Make Impeccable Introductions

*Use the name of the “most special” person first.* Being able to introduce people and explain who they are makes everyone feel comfortable in a new situation and is one of the most useful skills you can acquire. In business, introductions are based on a person’s rank and position in the company. Whether that person is a man or a woman, young or old, makes no difference. The highest-ranking person is mentioned first and then the person being introduced. If possible, include descriptions of each person. For example:

- ❑ A junior executive is introduced to a senior executive. “Mr. Jones, I’d like to present Mr. Richard Blank, our new intern. Mr. Blank, this is Mr. John Jones, the president of our company.”
- ❑ A child is introduced to an adult. “Mr. Left, I would like you to meet my nephew, Todd Right. Todd, this is Mr. Left, my colleague.”
- ❑ Anyone is introduced to a guest of honor. “Celebrity Smith, I’d like to present our company president, Don Conti.” While the guest of honor “receives” the company president, at the same time you have honored the company president by including his business title in the introduction process.
- ❑ A coworker is introduced to a client or to a worker from another company.

*Use tricks for remembering names.*

- ❑ Repeat the person’s name a few times to yourself after you’re introduced.
- ❑ Use the person’s name immediately in the conversation after an introduction.
- ❑ Immediately introduce that new person to someone else you know.

*Be honest if you forget a name.* To handle the embarrassing situation of being approached by someone whose name slips your mind, initiate a handshake and reintroduce yourself. In most cases the person will do likewise. When making an introduction if you forget someone’s name, be honest about it. It’s better to admit it than to not make the introduction. You can say, “Excuse me, but your name has just escaped me...” or “I’m sorry, I’ve forgotten your name.” It happens.

*Help others with your name.* When you are being introduced, don’t be surprised if you have to come to the aid of the introducer. If he or she forgets your name, save the situation by extending your hand and doing it yourself. If an introducer gets your name wrong, mispronounces it, or relays inaccurate information about your job or background, politely make the correction without embarrassing him. “Actually, it’s Marta, not Martha.”

*Introduce yourself, if necessary.* If you enter into a group where introductions have already been made, introducing

yourself is always appropriate. If you’re participating in a conversation and there’s a person you don’t know and no one offers to make an introduction, you should introduce yourself. Simply say, “I don’t believe we’ve met. I’m Richard Martin.” If introducing yourself to a stranger is daunting, keep in mind that saying hello and telling someone your name is not a major commitment. Everyone in the room has at least something in common with you - they don’t know many people, they’re a little nervous, and they’re not sure what to say. All it takes is extending your hand and saying, “Hi, I’m Opie Taylor.” This will prompt the other person to respond with his or her name. Then, you can say, “What did you think of today’s speaker?” or “What company do you work for?” or even “How’s the artichoke dip?” It doesn’t have to be something profoundly interesting; it just has to be something. The other person will respond, and then you’re off.

## Four: Touch Appropriately and Know Gender Boundaries

*When in doubt, keep touching to handshakes.* The only legitimate form of touch in business is the handshake. Unless you’ve established a rapport with someone, a pat, nudge, or touch on the arm can be perceived as too friendly.

*Compliment skills, not appearance.* When you want to be complimentary, focus on business skills, not on physical appearance. You might like the way a colleague looks in his or her blue suit when addressing visiting dignitaries. However, you are on safer ground when you limit your compliment to the enthusiastic way the audience responded to your colleague’s comments. Avoid comments regarding hair, dress, or other physical attributes. Stick to complimenting the person’s business know-how and achievements.

*Help each other out if needed.*

**Opening the door.** Whoever gets to the door first, regardless of gender, should open it. It’s always good protocol to hold the door for the person behind you.

**Carrying packages.** It used to be that a man helped a woman carry packages, whether she needed assistance or not. Today, you should carry packages for anyone who needs or asks for your assistance.

**Putting on coats.** At one time, men helped women on with their coats, but today, the rule is the same as the one above: help anyone who needs it, regardless of gender.

**Helping to seat.** Pulling out someone else’s chair at a restaurant table and helping to push it in is called for only when the person is elderly, incapacitated, or could simply use some help, as with a heavy chair.

**Order your own food.** Each person should give his or her order to the waiter. If you are host, you should invite your

guest of honor to order first. As a woman, if the waiter starts with you, you can say, “Oh, please take my guest’s order first.”

**The host pays the bill.** The host should do the inviting and bill paying regardless of gender. If a guest insists on paying, allow it. You don’t want to fight over a bill.

## Five: Look Great

*Make the most of what you have.* Some aspects of our image we are born with, such as height, bone structure, or facial features. But even those characteristics may be changed by keeping in shape and a conscious use of cosmetics, hairstyles, and clothing. Clothing may definitely enhance or detract from someone’s basic physical self. If your taste is questionable, consider a “personal shopper” who, with your job in mind, suggests clothing selections that suit your body type, coloring, and corporate image.

*Use body language to your advantage.* Body language and receptivity are vitally important aspects of looking great. When participating in a conversation, be sure to project a positive and friendly attitude. Smile. Touch with a handshake. Maintain eye contact. Nod. Keep an open mind regarding future relationships. It’s a good way to help develop your professional network. You never know when your paths will cross again.

*Smile when you:*

- \* **...are introduced.** A smile suggests that you’re receptive to meeting this individual as opposed to feeling reluctant.
- \* **...feel uncomfortable.** Your confidence level should rise quickly because your smile invites positive feedback from others, which in turn can make you feel better.
- \* **...receive a compliment.** When you’re the one being praised, you boost your likeability quotient when you accept a compliment gracefully. Too many people feel undeserving of praise. Revealing those feelings can diminish the other person’s nice gesture.

*Smile sincerely.* A false smile is not a thing of beauty. It generally involves only the lip area of the face and isn’t accompanied by smiling eyes or relaxed facial expression. Someone who repeatedly flashes false smiles may get the reputation for being phony.

*Stand and sit with confidence.* You want to stand with a straight back, middle section in alignment with your back, shoulders back, and head up. This posture connotes comfort with yourself and ease in the situation. Slouching, sticking your belly out, stuffing your hands in your pockets, and folding your arms defensively all suggest aggressive unease. Take care in the way you sit. Think of the diversity of sitting positions you’ve seen in business meetings, from practically

horizontal to alert and upright. Sit with a straight back and with your legs together in front of you or crossed, either at the knee or at the ankle.

*Buy the highest quality clothing you can afford.* You spend most of your time at work, so spend most of your clothing budget on work clothes. You don’t need to buy a lot; buy classic clothing—nothing too trendy. Usually, it is made better, lasts longer, wears better, and doesn’t go out of style as quickly. Less is more when it comes to professional clothing. Choose clothing that fits properly. Your clothing needs to fit without over-emphasizing your body. Nothing should fit too tightly, and there shouldn’t be any buttons pulling or bulging of fabric. When in doubt, choose a business suit, which is still the most powerful look for both men and women.

*Attend to hair, jewelry, and shoes.* Keep your hair neat and in a fashion that flatters the shape of your face. Wear jewelry appropriate to the event and situation. The quality of jewelry and accessory items you wear is often perceived as a reflection of the kind of person you are. Also, many recruiters indicate that one of the first things they notice about a candidate is his or her shoes. Give the same attention to the grooming of your shoes that you do to your hair and clothing. Shoes should be so well maintained that they look like new.

## Six: Sound Fabulous

*Record yourself, and listen.* Proper speech refers to the tone, enunciation, pronunciation, loudness, and correctness of the words you use. Speech is a key part of your image since, in person, it may be noticed simultaneously with the way you are dressed and, on the phone, it is the one way your image is conveyed. Tape your voice and listen to it, or if you have voice mail or a phone machine at work, call your own number and listen critically to your own recorded message. Are you speaking clearly? Are there any unique ways of pronouncing or using words that are particular to your region that might be misunderstood or unclear to others? How appropriate are the words you use? Are your words too familiar or too aloof? Is the tone of your voice too sexy? Also, pay attention to your conversations with others. Do you speak too quickly, giving the impression that you are tense? Are you driven to tell an entire story without having an interactive conversation that allows the person you are addressing to make comments or even get some relief while listening to you? Is your voice so soft that words may be missed or someone has to constantly ask you to speak up?

*Avoid using a speakerphone.* The sound quality of most speakerphones is not flattering to either party. You tend to shout into a speakerphone, which is intrusive to those working around you, and those within earshot of the speakerphone can overhear what your caller is saying, which is

a violation of privacy. Furthermore a speakerphone may make those around you or those calling you think you are lazy because you do not want to pick up the receiver. If the receiver hurts your shoulder or neck, consider getting a good headset that works like a regular phone except that the pressure is off your shoulder.

*Eliminate sounds of pets and children.* If you work at home, at all costs, go to any measure to ensure that pets and children are never heard in the background when you are on the phone. This can hurt both your image and your organization's image. Such background noise implies that you are not a professional and that you are not part of a successful organization.

*Speak loudly enough to be heard and at an appropriate pace.* Many people speak too softly. If your volume is low, it becomes easy not to hear you. You can then become invisible and easy to ignore. People can speak so low that literally no one hears them. Check yourself to see if you need to turn up your volume. Also, pay attention to your rate of speaking. If people are always interrupting you, you may be speaking too slowly. If people keep asking you to slow down, chances are you are speaking too quickly. Adjust accordingly.

*Don't giggle.* Giggling is often heard at the end of people's sentences or statements. It's a habit that can make you appear nervous, insecure, or childish. Both men and women do it and often don't know they have this annoying mannerism.

## Seven: Organize Your Materials, Your Space and Your Time

*Do a self assessment of your work space.* Look at your office in a new way and ask yourself, "Would I want to visit someone who worked in this office, and if I did, what would it tell me about that person?" Make sure every accessory in your office is purposefully chosen to enhance your image. Don't choose things just by a whim or because you want to get rid of knickknacks or art work in your home. A messy desk is insulting. Keep your office neat and attractive, as you would your business clothes. Never have personal work or grooming items around. Do not eat lunch at your desk, if possible. If you drink coffee or other beverages at your desk, use a ceramic cup or a plastic glass, rather than take-out cups. Keep your business cards and pen in fixed locations so you won't have to search for them.

*Be on time.* There are norms about being on time, and violating those norms may lead others to question whether you are executive material. Showing up late indicates a lack of integrity, and it is just plain rude and inappropriate. Never be late for an appointment. Lateness can be a strike against you before your meeting even begins. When

scheduling appointments, focus on the time you need to leave rather than the arrival time. If you are preparing to leave for a meeting or appointment, break the habit of doing just one more thing or accepting that last-minute phone call. Focus on the commitment you've made.

*If you are delayed, acknowledge your breakdown and be cool.* Being late suggests poor time-management skills and insinuates you don't think the other person's time is valuable. If an emergency delays you, telephone the individual to explain your predicament. Be ready to reschedule the meeting if necessary, but don't make a new appointment if you're not sure you can keep it. It's more considerate to call back to confirm a proposed new meeting time and date than to cancel an appointment. If you do arrive late and the individual is willing to see you, courtesy demands that you apologize. When you enter a meeting in progress, you should be as unobtrusive as possible. Walk in, apologize briefly without interrupting anyone (don't make your excuses until the meeting is ended), and take your seat. It helps to have everything you need, such as pen and pad, at hand when you enter the room and to have turned off your cell phone. Above all, don't disturb the meeting by rattling papers, snapping a briefcase open and shut, shedding a coat or jacket, getting coffee, or whispering to your neighbors. Use your printed agenda to determine what is going on.

*Don't be too early.* Most meeting specialists warn strongly against arriving more than a few minutes early. The person holding the meeting may be involved in last minute preparations or may be trying to clear away other business before the meeting's start, and he or she will feel compelled to stop and greet early arrivals. For meetings outside your office, you may find yourself there well before you're supposed to be. If you arrive more than ten minutes early for a meeting being held outside your office, tell the receptionist you prefer not to disturb your host and wait until the scheduled meeting time.

## Eight: Correspond Flawlessly with E-Mail

*Be brief.* People in e-mail-intensive companies may get 200 or more messages per day! So, be brief, and if you don't get a response when you need one, follow up by phone.

*Use a greeting and closing.* Is it really that hard to type, "Hi Sage" or "Warm wishes, Riley"?

*Be personal.* Don't e-mail someone who sits across the aisle from you. If you're recapping a meeting, it's fine. But if you have a question for discussion, try speaking to each other.

*Be positive.* Don't use e-mail to lambaste a colleague. Especially don't copy others on the message. Disagreements or discipline are best handled in person, or at least

over the phone. Never write something in an e-mail that you wouldn't want published in the newspaper. Even if you send them to someone you trust, e-mails with sensitive, mean, or potentially embarrassing information have a way of being forwarded beyond your original audience.

*Respond promptly.* You should return your e-mail messages promptly—even if it's only to say, "I received your message but won't be able to give it my full attention until next week." If your e-mail package will support this feature, it's also a good idea to set a "vacation auto reply" when you will be out of touch for more than a day or two.

*Remember the rules of spelling and grammar.* Watch for spelling errors. If you're not a good speller, use the spell checker that comes with your e-mail package. If you're not sure about the rules of grammar, purchase a style manual, such as *The Elements of Style*.

*Don't use ALL CAPITALS or all lowercase letters.* Capitals are harder to read than regular text. In addition, many people view their use as the e-mail equivalent of yelling—so if you wouldn't scream it in the conference room, don't write it in all capitals. Don't use all lowercase letters. Proper nouns, names, and the first letter of each sentence should be capitalized.

*Don't send a message to too many people.* Does everyone on your project team need to see the details of setting up a conference room for next Thursday? No. Once you have completed the legwork, you can notify others with a single message. Also, be careful about using "Reply All" instead of "Reply to Sender." For example, if your manager sends out a message thanking everyone on the team for great work on the project, don't respond to the entire group telling her that it was your pleasure and that she's a great leader.

*Don't forward a long chain of e-mails without changing the original subject line.* This results in subjects like "FW:FW:RE:FW:FW: Our Meeting". If people can't figure out what the message is about, they may set it aside for later when they have more time to decipher it. Later is often never. Instead, create a specific title, like "Response Needed-June 15 Meeting."

*Don't circulate internet humor, campaigns virus warnings, or chain letters.* Long lists of "You must be a Texan if...", "You were a child of the 80s if...", and so on, are strictly off limits at work. The same goes for exhortations to save the rainforest, warnings about new kinds of diseases, and pleas to send greeting cards to sick children. While virus warnings can sometimes be helpful, the vast majority of them turn out to be scams. Delete those e-mails and check a reputable virus information web site for the real scoop. Do not participate in chain letters.

*Don't send or receive personal e-mail from work.* First,

the equipment and internet time belong to your company. Second, while we know you would never send anything offensive or harassing, it could be equally damaging to receive such material from a friend. There are a number of options for setting up a free e-mail address such as [www.hotmail.com](http://www.hotmail.com).

## Nine: Dine with Sophistication

*It's not about the food.* Understand the point of the business meal. You dine to conduct business and establish relationships. You may need to eat, but you are not there for the food. You want your habits to be impeccable so the focus is on the meeting part of the meal, not the eating part.

*Take charge if you're the host.* If you are the host, you need to be in charge and manage all of the logistics of the meal. Get to know a couple of good restaurants. Know that the food and atmosphere of the place are appropriate for business. Go there when entertaining. Make a reservation. If your client is a non-smoker, make sure your table is in the no-smoking section. Direct your guest to the most comfortable seat or the one with the best view. As the host, you pay the bill, regardless of gender.

*Wait in the lobby.* When meeting someone in a restaurant, wait in the lobby unless otherwise requested. If you're the first to be seated, wait until everyone has arrived before ordering a beverage.

*Know what to do with your napkin.* Always pick up the napkin and put on your lap still partially folded as soon as you are seated. Don't tuck your napkin into your shirt or belt. If you need to leave the table, place your napkin on the chair. When you're done eating, place your napkin to the left of your plate.

*Order the basics (salad, main course, and beverage).* If your host suggests an appetizer or dessert, be guided accordingly. Determine the appropriate price range by asking your host, "What do you recommend?" Do not simply order the stuffed lobster.

*Remember, bread is on the left, water is on the right.* Know which bread plate or water glass is yours. Here's a trick for remembering which one is yours: "Food" has four letters and "left" has four letters. Bread is food, so your bread plate is on the left. "Drink" has five letters and so does "right." Your water glass is on the right. If (and it often happens) someone takes over your bread plate, either eat no bread or use the side of your plate. Don't butter the whole piece of bread at once. Break off a bite-size piece and butter it before eating.

*Cut one piece of meat or large vegetable at a time.* Don't cut it all at once like you are preparing food for a child. Put your fork down between bites and cut your food as you go

along, rather than all at once.

*Pay attention to timing and pace.* Make your selection by the time everyone else is ready to order. If you're the host, make sure your guest's order is taken first, regardless of gender. Don't launch into business discussions right away. Make small talk first. In general, the time to discuss business matters is after the meal has been ordered. Maintain the same pace of eating as the person with whom you are dining. If the person is a slow eater, expand on a mutually interesting topic. If you're a slow eater, ask the person a question that might take a few minutes to answer.

*Know the utensil rules.* As a general rule of thumb, navigate your place setting from the outside in. Know the types of utensils. The largest fork is generally the entrée fork. The salad fork is smaller. The largest spoon is usually the soup spoon. When you're finished eating place your utensils in the finished position (if the dinner plate is a clock, your fork and knife are placed in parallel lines at approximately 10 and 4 o'clock with the knife on top, handles toward the four).

*Treat your server courteously and thank your host.* Do not call your server "Honey," "Boy," "Girl," "Sweetie," "Garçon," or anything else that may be offensive. Leave an appropriate tip. Generally you will leave 20% for a gratuity. If you are a guest, thank your host for the meal immediately after and send a handwritten thank you note within twenty-four hours if you were the guest at a meal.

## Summary

Protocol serves as the code of international politeness that blends ceremony, etiquette, and diplomatic form. In business arenas, the term protocol is often used instead of etiquette because it sounds more professional. Many companies have established their own rules of protocol as part of their culture to ensure smooth daily operations and to provide a competitive advantage.

### One | *Master handshakes and greetings.*

Be easy to meet and greet by keeping your right hand free. When you shake hands: think of a web; smile; lean in; make eye contact; and say your name. When you are seated and someone approaches you, stand up or do the bob.

### Two | *Be a magnificent mingler.*

Scan the room and be proactive. Move around. Avoid the food. Be polite. Make small talk. Have interesting topics to discuss. Be willing to reveal yourself. Take a risk.

### Three | *Make impeccable introductions.*

Use the name of the most special person first when introducing people to each other. Be honest if you forget a name. Help others with your name. Introduce yourself, if necessary.

### Four | *Touch appropriately and know gender boundaries.*

When in doubt, keep touching to handshakes. Compliment skills, not appearance. Help each other if needed with doors, packages, coats, and seats. Order your own food. The host pays the bill, regardless of gender.

### Five | *Look great.*

Make the most of what you have by staying fit. Use body language to your advantage. Smile sincerely when you are introduced, when you feel uncomfortable, and when you receive a compliment. Stand and sit with confidence. Buy the highest quality clothing you can afford. Attend to hair, jewelry, and shoes.

### Six | *Sound fabulous.*

Record yourself, and listen for any areas to improve. Avoid using a speakerphone. Eliminate background sounds of pets and children. Speak loudly enough to be heard. Pay attention to your rate of speaking. Don't giggle.

### Seven | *Organize your materials, your space, and your time.*

Do a self assessment of your work space. Be on time. If you are delayed, acknowledge your breakdown. Be cool when entering a meeting late. Don't be too early.

### Eight | *Correspond flawlessly with email.*

Be brief, be positive, and be prompt. Include a greeting and closing. Don't email someone who sits across the aisle from you. Remember the rules of spelling and grammar. Don't use ALL CAPITALS or all lowercase letters. Don't send a message to too many people. Don't forward a long chain of e-mails without changing the original subject line. Don't forward humor, campaigns, virus warnings, or chain letters. Don't send or receive personal email from work.

## Nine | *Dine with sophistication.*

It's not about the eating; it's about the meeting. Take charge if you're the host. Wait in the lobby for your dining companions. Know what to do with your napkin. Order the basics. Remember, bread is on the left, and water is on the right. Cut one piece food at a time. Be ready to order, watch your pace, wait to talk business after ordering. Know the utensil rules. Treat your server courteously and thank your host.

## Business Protocol Self-Assessment

On a scale of 1-10 with 1 being "I need lots of polish" and 10 being "I shine very brightly", please rate yourself in each of these business etiquette areas. There is no right or wrong answer, and your answers are confidential. ). The purpose of this tool is to heighten your consciousness about areas that you might want to improve. After conducting a self assessment, we urge you to seize all opportunities that come your way to learn, grow, and expand your protocol potential.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. The way I shake hands and greet people.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. The ease with which I mingle in social settings.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. The way I make introductions.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. My use of touch and my knowledge of gender boundaries.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. My appearance.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. The way I sound (voice, grammar, etc.)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. The organization of my materials, my space, and my time.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. My e-mail skills.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. The sophistication with which I dine.

## RESOURCES

*Business Etiquette for Dummies* by Sue Fox and Perrin Cunningham

*Business Etiquette in Brief: The Competitive Edge for Today's Professional* by Ann Marie Sabath

*Business Protocol: How to Survive and Succeed in Business* by Jan Yager

*Everyday Business Etiquette* by Marilyn Pincus

*Live for Success* by John T. Molloy

*Outclass the Competition: Business Etiquette for a Global Economy* by Dorothea Johnson

*The Etiquette Advantage in Business: Personal Skills for Professional Success* by Peggy Post and Peter Post

*The Random House Hostess Library: The Random House Book Etiquette, Volume I* by Random House.

*The Random House Hostess Library: The Random House Treasury of Cooking, Volume II* by Random House.

*When the Little Things Count...and They Always Count* by Barbara Pachter with Susan MaGee

*Working with Emotional Intelligence* by Daniel Goleman

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Dr. Marta Wilson** founded TSI and now leads the dynamic group of PhDs and possibility thinkers whose expertise guides executives to achieve bold enterprise transformation goals. Dr. Wilson represents TSI in the industry and regional community as part of business development in the organization. A Board Member of the Northern Virginia Technology Council, Dr. Wilson is active in multiple professional organizations. She holds a PhD in Industrial and Organizational Psychology from Virginia Tech and specializes in leadership effectiveness. Dr. Wilson created and steers TSI's Feed to Lead Program, which nourishes the body, mind and spirit by supporting leadership potential in local youth. A prolific writer, she has written leadership articles and books, including *The Transformation Desktop Guide*, *Live A Difference*, and, most recently, *Leaders in Motion: Winning the Race for Organizational Health, Wealth and Creative Power*.

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