GOOD MANNERS: YOUR FIRST BUSINESS CARD

By DARSHANA SIVANANTHAM
editor@leaderonomics.com

First impressions matter. We are raised in a society that places high regard on good manners and values. It doesn’t come as a surprise that most of us were taught to say our please and thank you’s early in life. In fact, it is very much an integral part of the Malaysian culture. Leaderonomics had a chance to attend an insightful talk by Idriz Konjari, Albania’s former ambassador to Malaysia, on social graces and the relevance of etiquette and protocol in current times. Read on to see how a little bit of good manners can take you a long way.

SOCIAL GRACE, ETIQUETTE AND PROTOCOL
Social grace is simply how we interact in social situations. These include the spectrum of etiquette, manners, dressing, and refinement. In earlier times, these were required skills taught to young women in finishing school. Etiquette and protocol are a customary code of polite behaviour in society. It’s a guide for good behaviour and commendable manners. Etiquette constantly changes, to suit society as it evolves; protocol however, rarely does. As we probably encounter more occasions where there is a need to precise good etiquette, here’s a set of simple etiquette tips for every day engagements.

INTRODUCING PEOPLE
Yes, there is an art to introducing people. The right way to introduce someone, is to first state the name of the person, followed by a formal introduction to another. For example, “Dave, I would like to introduce you to Ken.” Other phrases you can use include “please meet” or “this is.” A proper introduction is only complete when you also offer some details about each person. If you have some knowledge of common interests that they may share, this will help them to connect and subsequently carry on the conversation.

DRESS CODE

This is a rather tricky one. Typically, there are a few general categories of dress code that we follow – black tie or formal, white tie, cocktail, smart casual and casual.

Black tie events call for formal attire. Men are expected to wear dark suits or tuxedos, while women should be dressed in elegant gowns or dresses over knee length. Hair must be styled, worn up or down. In some countries, traditional and ethnic attire is also acceptable as formal or black tie attire.

White tie events are more formal than black tie events. Dress code for these events require men to be in full formal attire (white tie, vest and shirt). Women must wear their hair up, and be dressed in elegant gowns. Some common white tie events include charity and society balls. A more familiar dress code is the cocktail – which usually refers to semi-formal short or long elegant dresses for women, and dark suits for men.

Smart casual is one we hear often, being a common dress code at the office. The general rule of thumb for smart casual requires at least a smart jacket, and closed shoes. It is also acceptable for women to wear pants with this dress code. Although denim (and jeans) are not considered smart casual, in some cultures, it is perfectly acceptable to pair this with a smart jacket.

Finally, the dress code we all love – casual! Here’s where we wear our jeans, summer dresses and skirts. However, even the casual dress code has some rules. We may assume that flip-flops or slippers are suitable to wear with this dress code, but it’s inappropriate in some settings.

DINING

There’s a whole list of do’s and don’ts when it comes to dining. To get started, it is always important to remember that burping, slurping, talking with your mouth full, and hands or elbows on the table are considered bad table manners. It’s also important to remember that when dining, it isn’t only about the food; it’s also about the company. When seated at a table with other guests, always remember to politely engage others in conversation.

There’s a whole list of cutlery that needs some remembrance if a formal table setting. We’re not going to go into details here, but rest assured that there’s ample information available online on how to use forks, spoons and knives the right way. The key is to always remember that like everything else in life, even this can be learnt and applied accordingly. After every dining experience, do take time to send over a personal thank you note to your host.

CARRYING CONVERSATIONS

While starting conversations can be easy for some, sustaining them can be difficult. Some key pointers to keep in mind when carrying conversations include:

- Talk less, and listen more
- Be prepared with topics to discuss
- Tailor conversations to suit your listeners
- Avoid sensitive topics such as politics and religion

IF ALL ELSE FAILS – JUST SMILE

The above serve as a guide to practising good etiquette in various situations that arise in our lives. Having the knowledge of good etiquette and practising it helps us in many ways, and reflects highly on the way we carry ourselves as individuals interacting in a society that places high value on good practices and manners.

If all else fails, then just use the most important curve on your body – your smile! A genuine, warm smile makes up for anything, if it comes from the right place.