

NEWS

'Miss Manners' shares her etiquette wisdom

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For better or worse, there comes a time when we tell others what to do, are told by others what to do, or are simply at a loss of what to do. The public signs alone, like "No smoking," "No honking" or "Do not feed the ducks," all demonstrate that society can't survive without rules. And that's where "Miss Manners" comes in.



MARTIN

"I try to have optimism that everybody will behave one day," said "Miss Manners," who also goes by the name Judith Martin, during her talk at Mountain View's Community School of Music and Arts, Finn Center, on Tuesday. Martin has been writing a nationally syndicated advice column for the Washington Post for 25 years. She has also written a number of books, including the most recent "Miss Manners' Guide to Excruciatingly Correct Behavior, Freshly Updated."

Martin takes a traditional approach to tackling modern-day problems, like when to hold doors for a lady, how to say "no" to a marriage proposal, how to dress for an interview or "come out" to the family.

On Tuesday, Martin lamented people's underestimation of etiquette: "I get so many letters from adolescents and people in their early 20s who were brought up on this ridiculous notion of 'Oh, just be yourself!'" said Martin. "Now ... people get to behave in a formal way twice in their lives: Once for their high school prom, where their idea of formal behavior is to rent a three-block-long car and run around town throwing up in it; and once at a wedding. And then it's all over," she said. But, she said, etiquette is necessary every day.

Martin soon got down to business at the talk and took questions from the audience:

► On asking for medical advice at parties: "Never take professional advice at parties. My great uncle, who is a doctor, used to say, 'Well, take off your clothes and let me take a look at you.'"

► On planning weddings: "The wedding is totally out of control. It has turned into the idea that some people who have probably never done any real entertaining in their lives are expected to spend a year putting on a three-four day extravaganza and starring in it, and they believe they can conscript everybody to work for them. Runaway bride? Why are there no more runaway bridesmaids? And runaway parents? And runaway wedding guests?"

► On how to respond to videos or pictures of birth: "There are too many people mentioning their insides, and I'm very tired of it. Say what you always say, 'What a cute baby,' and 'My, isn't your wife pretty!'"

► On erroneous or forwarded e-mails: "There's a wonderful little button on the computer called delete, and it should be used more often." Martin also cautioned against improper use of e-mail, such as for condolences: "Sorry about your loss (smiley face)."

► On casual Fridays at the office: "It detracts from the idea that you put on your professional self when you go to work. And it's a terrible hoax on the people who do it. Everybody with any brains knows you are still being judged symbolically by how you dress."

► On the proverbial guest towel: "That's what they're there for. People put out guests towels, so their guests can wipe their hands, after they, we hope, washed their hands after they go to the bathroom. Do it."

► On people who don't cover their mouth when coughing or sneezing: "Give him a guest towel."

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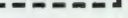
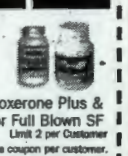


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