

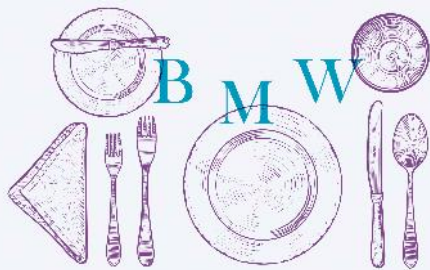


THE FINE AND FUN ART OF BUSINESS DINING

By Terry P. Ubers

An etiquette expert shares the inside scoop on mastering the business lunch/dinner

Business dining is an integral part of the business world. It's a great way to build relationships and achieve success, but it can be a little daunting when you're starting out in your career. Read on for some tips to help you feel comfortable and make a great impression at the table. (As a bonus, many of these tips will also help you look good while dining on a date or any other social occasion).



UH OH! I THINK I TOOK SOMEONE'S BREAD PLATE

Ever been unsure which bread plate or glass is yours? This can be especially confusing at a round table. Here's a simple trick: think of a new, shiny BMW: B for bread plate on your left, M for main plate in the middle, and W for water glass on your right.

PROTECT YOUR ASSETS (OR COVER THEM)

Unless you're a millionaire and have a huge wardrobe budget, you'll want to protect your nice business clothes. Always put your napkin on your lap early in the meal because... well, stuff happens. When it comes to napkins, don't blow your nose into it; rather, use it occasionally to wipe your lips before you speak or take a drink.

WHAT WOULD MEGHAN AND HARRY NOT ORDER?

If you want to look royal or at least classy when dining, don't order anything too messy. That means staying away from ribs, tacos, and even spaghetti. If you want a pasta, order smaller ones like penne or ravioli. Also, if it's on somebody else's tab, it's good manners not to pick the most expensive item on the menu.

TORTOISE OR THE HARE?

It can be awkward if you're a fast eater or a slow-poke. Gulp down your meal and you get to sit and watch the others eat. Loiter over the meal and they have to wait for you. Try to keep pace with your dining companions. For this reason, it's also important to match their order of courses. That means if they order a starter dish, you should order something to accompany them. If they skip the appetizer, you should too.

WHICH FORK SHOULD I USE?

When fine dining, there are often multiple forks and knives at your place setting. The simple rule is that you start with the utensils on the outside first, and work your way in with each course—toward the utensils closest to the centre of your place setting.

GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS

Some meals are focused on getting to know each other, and business is left to be discussed over dessert and coffee. That's why it's important to have some small talk ready. Whoever is hosting the meal usually initiates the business talk. The exception to this rule is when the client brings up business. That's usually a signal that they are ready to move the conversation in that direction.

AMERICAN OR CONTINENTAL STYLE?

In North America, there are two "proper" styles of eating. If the knife stays in your right hand and the fork stays in your left hand as you cut and eat the food, you are using the Continental style. If you put your knife down after cutting and move the fork to your right hand for eating, you are using the American style (sometimes called the zigzag method).

Pay attention to other diners to see which style appeals most to you. Left-handed diners tell me that the Continental style is easier for them to use. Whatever style you choose, make sure that you practice it at home so you don't appear awkward when dining in public.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

No one was born knowing proper table manners or the art of business dining—not even Meghan and Harry. Treat it as one more tool in your success arsenal. It takes 30 days of practice to break a habit. Your dining habits, good or bad, have been ingrained since you were eating in a high chair.

Augment these tips with a dining etiquette book, an online video, or check out some further articles on the Style for Success blog. You can practice at every meal, even if you're eating on a TV tray while binge-watching *The Handmaid's Tale*. Dine in like you were dining out. Soon your smooth table manners will be second nature and you'll shine and enjoy your business dining. **C**



Terry Pithers is a partner with Style for Success, Canada's premier team of soft skills trainers, business etiquette experts, and 'savvy not stuffy' speakers. They work with organizations and leaders who recognize the importance of a professional image and people skills in building a brand, meeting client expectations, and generating trust, credibility, and profit. For more information, visit StyleforSuccess.com.