

Manners Matter

“The number one rule of etiquette is making people feel comfortable. It’s more important than using the right fork,” said

Mary Jean Billingsley, program director, Career Services Center.

Recently certified by the Protocol School of Washington, D.C., Billingsley can tell you the proper seating order for an international business dinner based on a guest’s rank and function, when and when not to take a sip during a toast and how to give a proper handshake. Billingsley attended the school, recognized as one of the best protocol schools in the world, for an intensive five days of training with 30 U.S. and international participants, many who were gov-

ernment protocol officers. The week included training from the director of protocol for the Smithsonian Institution, speech critiques by a national speech consultant, materials development from a New York marketing executive and the experience of a formal dinner complete with a receiving line and toasts.

In 2000, Billingsley started an etiquette seminar, *First Impressions*, which is offered twice a semester through the Career Services Center as a way to give JCCC students an edge in today’s job market. During a three-hour, six-course dinner in the Capitol Federal Conference Center, participants learn how to conduct business while balancing hors d’oeuvres with a glass and eating soup correctly. She says many job interviews are conducted during a meal or social event. The seminar also covers business introductions, Internet etiquette, savvy on the golf course and business correspondence.

“Manners matter,” Billingsley said.

Even in today’s more casual work environment, Billingsley says etiquette still applies. She talks to students about how to best represent oneself in person, on paper and electronically. The new spin to Emily Post’s guidelines is “netiquette.” Billingsley advises job-seekers to clean up their electronic presence because employers check out the Internet.

“Really clean up your image on MySpace or Facebook – remove images of you drinking or using bad language that would indicate a lack of judgement to an employer,” Billingsley cautions. “Make sure your e-mail address and cell phone answering message are professional.”

And, while it is an electronic age, a handwritten, hand-delivered note following an interview will make you stand out among applicants, Billingsley says.

She has been in the field of career planning for 25 years but took a career turn into the food industry for a few years as co-owner of a business supplying ingredients to white-tablecloth restaurants. She is also a Certified Tourism Ambassador for Kansas City.

Billingsley continues to offer *First Impressions* seminars with additional seminars for students and faculty/staff in leadership programs at JCCC and other universities. 🌿



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