Work Daze: Slob on the job

by Bob_Goldman

Wonder why you didn't get that big promotion? Concerned because you haven't received a raise since Britney Spears was hot? Well, guess what - I know the reason.

It isn't your dreadful performance or your workplace incompetence or your total inability to reach your annual productivity goals. It's your manners.

You're a slob on the job, you yob, and everyone knows it, even your boss.

Fortunately, there's help for the manners-challenged. If you don't know which pinky to raise when chugging a Red Bull, Judith Bowman is ready with a helping hand. The etiquette expert is the author of a new book, "Don't Take the Last Donut: New Rules of Business Etiquette" and according to the flack who rather impolitely notified me of its publication with an e-mail that started "Hello Robert," instead of the more correct salutation, "Listen up, fat head," your failure to act in a civilized manner at the dinner table could influence your success at the conference table.

"The dining table is a great stage from which to share your personal side and demonstrate the respect that you hold for your client or prospect," Bowman opines, presumably not with her mouth full. "It is a moment when you can display your proper attention to etiquette, protocol, manners and a myriad of details that can set you apart and distinguish you from the competition."

Does this mean you have to give up showing your executive potential by munching on whole turkey legs in the style of Henry XIII, or stop slurping your soup straight from the bowl, even though it is environmentally correct to save all the water that otherwise would be used washing a spoon and a fork? Probably so.

To avoid any further demonstrations of acting, as your mother would say, like you "grew up in a barn," here are a few tips from the Bowman book on getting ahead with your fork and spoon.

- "Order items that are easy to eat (not ribs, lobster, etc.)"

While it is an attractive idea to take advantage of an expense account meal to order the lobster, watching you crush a crustacean may be somewhat less attractive. The sound of shells exploding and the sight of butter dripping from your greasy lips may be a turn off for your dining companion, especially if he or she is footing the bill. And don't think you can get away with a messy meal by wearing a napkin around your neck. "That is

for children," insists Bowman.

Of course, the real problem is that even the most simple of dishes can be difficult to consume if you are dining in terror. The idea of losing an important client or a major promotion could cause a circus juggler to fumble his PB&J. Therefore, I suggest that whatever you choose from the menu, request that the chef to put it through the Cuisinart. Tell your dining companion that you've developed ulcers from working too hard, making it impossible for you to eat solid food. And you'll be surprised how tasty a lobster shake can be.

- "Always pass the salt and pepper together, do not pass just one or the other."

Bad idea. If your companion was smart enough to tell the difference between pepper and salt they wouldn't be dining with you.

- "Do not dunk donuts in coffee."

Well, duh! Put the doughnut on a plate and pour your coffee into the hole.

That's what it's there for. Then you can use your knife and fork to eat your doughnut and its little lake of coffee. Or ask for a straw and suck up the coffee, leaving you with a soggy doughnut you can put in your pocket and eat later - on the unemployment line.

- "If your food is bad, try to eat it anyway."

Another obvious ploy, but it makes perfect sense when dining with a superior. If you'll happily eat wretched food, you're more likely to put up with the bad behavior that management serves to you at work.

- "Eat a hamburger like a sandwich, cut it in half."

Or, if you really want to make an impression, cut it in quarters, or eighths, or just carry a cleaver in your briefcase that you can use to attack the unsuspecting burger, chopping it up like Freddie Krueger on a rampage. Add some karate shouts and wresting grunts and your dining companion will run out of the restaurant. Then you can order the lobster.

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