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BALSAM'S FIRST BOOK, *Travel Etiquette, a Guide for the Modern Traveler*, is now available in the UAE.

Top tips for the following scenarios

• At a job interview: Never overdress (e.g. don't wear lots of jewellery, very high heels or very expensive clothing). Keep your look neat, chic and professional. Listen and talk when you need to answer. Most important, neither bad mouth your current employer, nor ask for the salary (unless asked what to expect).

• At a dinner party: Always check the details of the invitation and dress accordingly to avoid any embarrassment. Never abuse the drinks facility if offered. Limit your conversation to "small talk" when newly introduced.

• In the office: Never use the landline facilities for personal calls. Not only you are not

Photo: Supplied

KEEPING UP APPEARANCES

We ask etiquette specialist and image consultant Balsam Al Khalil how she finds teaching people to mind their Ps and Qs for a living

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BEING THE CHIEF Representative Officer for Bank of Beirut in the UAE & the Gulf Region and a law graduate, it is not surprising Balsam Al Khalil picked up a thing or two about how to conduct herself professionally. Topped off with a course in etiquette, fashion styling and image consultancy at the London College of Fashion and the Finishing Touch Academy in Dubai, Balsam recently publishing a book on manners for frequent travellers.

Here she lets us in on how to

avoid embarrassment in social situations.

What relevance does etiquette training have in today's seemingly more equal/classless society? Or do you believe society has not changed in that regard? Etiquette, which is basically the set of rules and guidelines to help people behave in a proper way and save them from embarrassing situations, is very important. Manners are universal, hence taking courses in etiquette and protocol is a way to success in all aspects of life. Training in that field is becoming popular both on a personal and professional basis.

What is the one faux pas people often commit that annoys you the most?

People usually have no clue that the water glass is always on the right side and the bread is on the left.

When did you realise etiquette was important and why did you become an adviser? How does one become an etiquette expert?

What qualifies you to teach? I always thought that good manners were important and I was trained to behave as such from an early age. Lots of schools/collages train you in etiquette but being an advisor needs a "train the trainer" certification, which I initially obtained and am also in the

process of obtaining a masters in International Etiquette & Protocol by the end of June.

Do you think etiquette is regarded highly enough by the majority of people?

The best time to start is by teaching the younger generation at a very early age. Companies should have their employees enroll in etiquette orientation classes to learn the secrets of business.

Have you ever encountered anybody who was completely unable to adapt to your training?

Usually the people who approach you are the ones who have the full will to learn. Kids might be difficult at times,

that is why the explanation and training should always be conducted in a light and fun way.

What advantages would you say people with your training benefit from?

Success in whatever they do. Confidence will be nurtured and they definitely get great self-esteem.

Who are the most well mannered people you meet on average? Is there a nationality that you would say is more versed in etiquette, for example?

Usually the people who work in the hospitality industry are the ones who tend to behave in a proper way as

supposed to, but always remember that your calls might be recorded! Never intrude into someone's office or cubicle. Always have your lunch in the kitchen and on your desk. Always keep your looks as professional as possible (decent/modest/smart).

it is a part of their overall training. As for nationality, I have to say that the Japanese are the strictest nation when it comes to etiquette and protocol.

Is there a difference whether you are male or female when it comes to the benefit of your training? Who do you believe holds it in higher regard and does one set take to the training better than the other?

Not at all. These days, both male and females are contributors to the global economy. Therefore their best ingredient and ticket to success is to be well-trained and good mannered.

