



Introduction

As part of the interview process, typically the second interview, you may be invited to lunch or dinner with the employer. For some, this can be the most daunting meal in the post-graduate world. How will you handle yourself? Remember to dress professionally and see our handout “Dress to Impress” for more details on what to wear. Employers look for good communication and interpersonal skills and a meal is an excellent place to show off such qualities. Fortunately, it is never too late to learn table manners.

Before the Meal

- x Drink a glass of juice; this will stabilize your blood sugar and keep you from “starving.”
- x Place your napkin on your lap after everyone is seated and after your host has moved his/her napkin.
- x Review the menu and decide what you want to order quickly.
- x Let the host take the lead when ordering; this will give you an idea of what to eat.
- x If the recruiter is not first in line to order ask him/her, “What do you recommend?”

During the Meal

- x If your place is set with more than one fork, begin from the outside and work your way in.
- x This is a time for both you and the recruiter to relax and get to know one another better.
- x Hold your knife or fork with the thumb and three fingers, keeping the index finger extended on the handle.
- x When cutting meat, the fork prongs should be pointed down, not up.
- x Cut your meat or meal one piece at a time; avoid dicing it into bit-sized pieces all at once.
- x With dinner rolls, break off and butter one small piece of bread at a time; avoid making a sandwich.
- x When sharing a sauce with others, spoon some of it onto your plate; don’t dip your food into it.
- x Strive to come across as relaxed, friendly and interested in the conversation; stay upbeat and positive.
- x Stay away from too much personal information at the table such as religion, politics or controversial topics.
- x Use this opportunity to gather more information about the career field, corporate culture and job duties.
- x Put your silverware on your plate in the “rest position” when you speak, not on the table.
- x “Rest position” means your knife and fork are at 5 and 7 o’clock respectively.
- x If you need to leave the table temporarily, place your napkin on your seat.
- x Maintain good eye contact throughout the meal and avoid dominating the conversation.

After the Meal

- x When you are finished eating, place the knife and fork (prongs down) side by side on the plate with the handles at 4 o’clock; the waiter will understand this as the “I am finished” position.
- x When you are done with the meal place your napkin to the left of your plate.
- x Make sure you thank the host for providing the meal or taking you out.
- x Shake hands with the recruiter before you leave and maintain good eye contact.

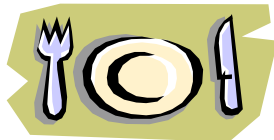
Do's & Don'ts

- x Do sit up straight and don't tip your chair back.
- x Do keep your elbows off the table.
- x Do say "please" and "thank you," people do notice.
- x Do take your time eating, talking and especially listening to everyone at the table.
- x Do drink from *your* waterglass; it is to your right.

- x Don't ask the waiter to explain everything on the menu; you will annoy others and appear indecisive.
- x Don't order the most expensive item on the menu and don't order any unfamiliar food.
- x Don't order sloppy or hard to eat foods such as linguini, spaghetti or any other pasta with sauces that splash.
 - p Lobster is delicious, but do you want the recruiter to see you wearing a bib?
 - p Avoid slurping your soup.
- xDon't order any food that requires you to use your fingers like chicken wings, big sandwiches or burgers.
- xDon't speak with your mouth full.
- xDon't lick your utensils or fingers.
- xDon't dip your food into a bowl others have to use.
- xDon't over indulge; this is not your last meal.
- xDon't forego the meal; what message do you send by eating a piece of lettuce or cheese from the buffet table?
- xDon't ask for anyone's leftovers (i.e. - "Are you going to finish your chips?").
- xDon't drink alcohol; if you choose to drink, limit it to one beer or glass of wine.
 - 1 Ordering iced tea is dignified and won't raise the risk of you babbling about last weekend's party.
- xDon't argue over that check or offer to pay the tip; the host who invited you must take care of both.
- xDon't use toothpicks in the presence of the recruiter.

Power Dining Results

Some employers view the meal as a time to judge how the candidate interacts with others. Someone who is good at one-on-one situations might not be great in a group setting. The meal shows the candidate's potential as a team player and his/her ability to move from one setting to another. It is unlikely that using the wrong fork will ruin your chances at a job with the company. However, table manners do count and any inappropriate behavior might tip the scales in the balance toward another candidate. Be sure you take your dining etiquette seriously. The most important thing to remember is that you are making an impression at the meal and not just the interview.



Source:

~~Barbara Pachter of Pachter & Associates; The Hope Heart Institute Newsletter, Seattle, WA, April 1998; NACE Job Choices 1997, and Siena College~~