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REDMOND REPORTER PROVIDING PROPER ETIQUETTE

By **MARY STEVENS DECKER**
Redmond Reporter
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Redmond Rotarian says good manners should not just be reserved for special occasions

When people hear the word "etiquette," they tend to picture a formal dinner party and angst over which fork to use, said Corinne Gregory, a Redmond Rotarian and president/founder of The Polite Child.

The company offers etiquette training for kids — and adults — in Redmond and other Eastside locations.

Most of us are not going to dine at the White House anytime soon. Yet on a daily basis, good etiquette boils down to "always treating others the way you want to be treated," Gregory emphasized.

When she entered this line of work in 2001, it was to teach manners to children. But it evolved into ensuring that parents and educators also know how to conduct themselves. You can't expect a child to be polite if you don't model the desired behaviors.

And the same manners you'd use at a dinner party can increase your success in professional settings, she said.

"These behaviors shouldn't be reserved for special occasions. They should be practiced all the time," she said.

That said, the holiday season presents a larger than usual minefield of scenarios where your "social smarts" may be tested. We asked Gregory how to navigate some sticky situations that often arise between Thanksgiving and the New Year.

• You got a holiday invitation but forgot about it or waited to see what was on your schedule that week. You never RSVP'd but at the last minute, you decide to go. Should you call ahead to check with the host/hostess, just show up or not go?

Gregory called failure to RSVP "the height of rudeness." Respond one way or another, she said. If you remember at the last minute, apologize when you call and ask if it's still okay to come, or admit that you can't come.

"Put yourself in the other person's shoes. It's better to be honest than to cover it up. People will see through it," said Gregory.

• You're at a holiday party and someone has told an off-color joke or made a comment you find offensive. Should you ignore the inappropriate remark or is there a proper way to put the person in their place, without causing more friction?

It's best to ignore it, said Gregory. "The silence that ensues will tell them they're out of line. If they're a complete boor, don't participate in the conversation with them. But telling them off — especially if they've been drinking — is throwing fuel on the fire."

If they persist in being obnoxious, such as asking, "What's the matter? Don't you think that's funny?," calmly say no and walk away.

• You're on a restricted diet due to medical, religious or other personal reasons. Should you call the host/hostess ahead of time to let them know what you will or won't be eating?

"It's okay to say you have a food allergy or politely ask if the food contains nuts or other things you can't eat," said Gregory. "But don't put the focus on you."

If you're in doubt about what will be served, you could eat something before you go, she suggested.

Meanwhile, "As a hostess, it's gracious to make a note of what guests can eat and always present a vegetarian option. If you know someone's allergic, let them know it contains peanut oil," she commented.

• Your neighbor's or sister's child is behaving horribly at a party in your home — running wild, throwing things, fighting. Do you nicely ask the child to stop, ask the child's parent to discipline them or do nothing?

"Sometimes a parent is not aware. They may be out of range," said Gregory. "It's all right to approach the

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to 'Don't do that!', she noted.

"If it continues, you are in a right to approach the child's parent and say, 'Would you mind keeping an eye on him?' If he continues to be disruptive, try saying, 'This may not be a good day for your child.'"

Realize that holidays can wreak havoc on everyone's routines, especially children's. Being forced to wear uncomfortable clothing, eat unfamiliar foods, interact with people they don't know well or stay up later than usual is bound to put a child over the edge.

A thoughtful host might hire a sitter and offer different foods for the kids. "Don't expect them to behave like an adult," said Gregory.

And what if your child is the one who's being a brat? If everyone's giving you the evil eye, take the hint and call it a night.

- Is it okay to bring your pet to someone's holiday gathering without asking? Or if you have pets, is it all right to let your animals roam free during a party in your home?

Gregory replied, "Many people are allergic to animals or uncomfortable around them. Even if you think the dog is a member of the family, don't inflict your or your pet's feelings on others. This holiday is not just about you."

So unless you're positive that guests share your love of animals, don't assume that they do.

- You can't afford to — or don't want to — buy gifts for everyone at your office or your extended family. How do you make this known without seeming cheap or like "a stick in the mud?"

Gregory responded, "It's an unfair scenario to force someone to give. A gift should be from the heart. ... People shouldn't take it upon themselves to say, 'Here's what we're doing and here's how much you will spend.' Don't set a precedent saying everyone has to have a gift."

She recommended, "If you like, buy a few, small inexpensive gifts that can be given if you want to, even at the last minute. Or offer a homemade gift that shows care or concern — a batch of fudge or cocoa mix."

- Perhaps you or others in your family or workplace don't celebrate Christmas or Hanukkah. How do you give yourself or others an "out" so that they won't feel offended or pressured to do something that's not true to their beliefs?

"The holidays should be a re-focus on the community — maybe do a community service," instead of traditional holiday activities, said Gregory.

Also, be aware that people who aren't celebrating probably aren't trying to snub you. "Many people feel isolated because they're not all happy. Look outside yourself. What can you do for somebody else?"

A "live and let live" attitude is commendable, she continued. "Don't lecture about your religious beliefs or lack thereof, or ask them how the lights they're stringing are affecting the carbon footprint. We have gotten so 'all about ourselves.' Political correctness has almost become a subtle form of bullying. It had good intentions, but ... not everyone is going to agree with you. The best litmus test is how you would want someone to treat you."

- On that note, with the unstable economy this holiday season, many employers will have to nix holiday bonuses or worse yet, lay people off. As an employer, to be polite — and humane — when should you tell employees how deep the budget cuts are going?

"Bad news doesn't get better with age," Gregory stated. "You need to tell them as soon as you know. Taking care of employees and clients is your business."

For more information about etiquette training through The Polite Child, call (425) 485-4089 or visit www.politechild.com.

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