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Killer Conversation Starters So You Can Talk to Anyone Whether you're dining à deux or at a bustling group for two, the conversation can get deep and personal. This is your chance to really connect! Action Steps: Take turns: Aim for a balanced back-and-forth. If you've been talking for a while, pause and ask, "But enough about me, what's your take on this?" Go beyond small talk. Try questions like, "What's been the highlight of your year so far?" or "If you could master any skill overnight, what would it be?" Listen actively: Show you're engaged by nodding, maintaining eye contact, and asking follow-up questions among other open body language cues. Example Scenario: You're having dinner with a potential business partner. After discussing work, transition with, "I'm curious, outside of the office, what passion projects are you working on?" This shows interest in them as a person, not just a professional contact. Terrific Trio With three people, the dynamic shifts. It's all about keeping everyone involved and avoiding any awkward third-wheel situations. Action Steps: Include everyone: If one person has been quiet, bring them in with a question like, "Sarah, what are your thoughts on this?" Find common ground: Try, "What's the most interesting place you've all traveled to?" This encourages shared storytelling. Use open-ended questions: "If you could have dinner with any historical figure, who would it be and why?" This allows for creative, engaging responses from everyone. Reminder: Be mindful of body language. Ensure you're positioned to easily make eye contact with both people, creating an inclusive atmosphere. Large Group Dynamics When you're part of a bigger group, the conversation can be lively but challenging to navigate. Here's how to keep it flowing smoothly: Action Steps: Break into smaller conversations: It's natural for large groups to split into smaller chat clusters. Don't feel pressured to include everyone in every discussion. Be a conversation bridge: If you hear interesting points from different conversations, connect them. "John, I just heard Lisa mention something similar about..." Use inclusive topics: "What's the best advice you've ever received?" This type of question allows everyone to contribute without putting anyone on the spot. Be aware of volume: In larger groups, it's easy to get loud. Modulate your voice to be heard without shouting. Pro Tip: In larger groups, it's okay to have multiple conversations happening at once. Don't feel the need to control or participate in every discussion. Focus on engaging meaningfully with those nearest to you. FUN FACT: Research shows that in group conversations, people tend to speak to the person sitting opposite them more than those beside them. Keep this in mind when choosing your seat! Believe it or not, how you handle (or mishandle) your bread can speak volumes about your dining etiquette. Common mistake to avoid: Buttering your entire piece of bread roll at one time can lead to a messy situation and make it difficult to manage your bread. Action Steps: Locate your bread plate: Your bread plate is typically located to the left of your dinner plate. Familiarizing yourself with this can prevent any confusion or awkward moments. Transfer butter properly: Use your butter knife to transfer a small amount of butter to your bread plate. This allows you to butter your bread easily without passing the butter dish around constantly. Butter one piece at a time: Tear off a bite-sized piece of bread and butter each piece individually before eating it. This method ensures you eat what you butter and keeps your dining experience neat. Hold bread properly: Hold the small piece of bread with your fingers, not in your palm or on your plate. This keeps the bread clean and prevents crumbs from scattering. How do you hold a wine glass? What are even the basic types of glassware you might find at a dinner event? Read on: Wine Glasses: Red Wine: Hold the glass by the bowl to warm the wine slightly, which releases the aromas. White Wine: Hold the glass by the stem to keep the wine cool. Sparkling Wine: Hold the flute by the stem to keep the bubbly drink at the ideal temperature. Water Glasses: Hold the glass near the base or lower part to avoid warming the water with your hand. Cocktail Glasses: Martini Glass: Hold by the stem to keep the drink cold. Highball or Lowball Glass: Hold near the bottom part of the glass to avoid warming the drink. Example Scenario: At a formal dinner, you are served a glass of chilled white wine. To hold the glass properly, grip the stem between your thumb and forefinger. This keeps the wine at the perfect temperature and prevents unsightly fingerprints on the bowl. Reminder: Avoid gripping the bowl of a stemmed glass. This not only leaves fingerprints but can also change the temperature of the wine or drink, affecting its taste. Also, do not forget to wipe the rim of the glass after each sip if necessary, especially when wearing lipstick. FUN FACT: Even non-alcoholic drinks have their etiquette. Hold a juice glass near the middle or bottom to keep it cool. For tea, use the handle to avoid burning your fingers and changing the tea's temperature. When drinking soda from a wide-rimmed glass, hold it near the middle or bottom to keep it refreshing. Generally, it's best to keep phones off the table to maintain a polite and engaging atmosphere. Giving your full attention is a sign of respect. We understand you're important, but so are the people around you. Constantly checking your phone or other belongings can come off as rude and disrespectful for them. Action Steps: Remove all belongings: Clear the table of phones, purses, and other items to promote a unified and engaging atmosphere. Inform your companions: If you're expecting an important call or text, it can be nice to inform your companions ahead of time. When the call comes, excuse yourself from the table to use your phone. Excuse yourself: If you must take a call, step away from the table to handle it privately. This shows consideration for others and keeps the conversation at the table uninterrupted. Whether you're served a challenging dish like spaghetti or a delicate bowl of soup, here's what you need to know! For Spaghetti: Twirl, don't cut: Twirl a small amount of spaghetti onto your fork using a spoon to help guide it. Avoid cutting the spaghetti, as this can be messy and is considered poor etiquette. No slurping: Avoid slurping the spaghetti. Twirl manageable portions to prevent any splattering or awkward slurping noises. For Soup: Spoon away from you: When eating soup, spoon it away from you and sip quietly from the side of the spoon. This technique helps prevent spills and maintains a clean eating experience. Cool naturally: Avoid blowing on the soup to cool it. Instead, wait for it to cool naturally to show patience and respect for the dining environment. For Foods with Bones (e.g., Fish or Chicken): Use knife and fork: Use your knife and fork to carefully separate the meat from the bones. You might benefit from practicing beforehand if you're new to this. Place discarded bones properly: Place any discarded bones on the edge of your plate, not on the table or another dish. Do not forget to thank your host by name. Offer a firm handshake while maintaining eye contact. Later, you might want to even follow up with a thank-you email or a written note to express your appreciation. Example Scenario: When you're already done with your meal. Place your knife and fork parallel on your plate, with the handles at the four o'clock position and tips at the ten o'clock position. This signals to the waiter that you're finished. If you've used a spoon or other utensils, place them on the plate or bowl they were used with. Do not push your plate away or stack dishes; leave them where they are for the waitstaff to clear. Before you pay, be aware of any cultural customs related to paying for a meal. In some cultures, it's customary for the host to pay, while in others, splitting the bill is the norm. Familiarize yourself with these general customs to avoid misunderstandings. Action Steps: Inform the waiter: If you're the host or know you're going to pay, make it clear beforehand that you'll be covering the bill. You can subtly inform the waiter ahead of time to bring the check directly to you, such as saying "Excuse me, I'll be taking care of the bill today. Could you bring it to me when we're ready?" If not the host: If it's your boss or manager, you're usually not expected to pay. Otherwise, offer to split the bill or take turns paying on different occasions. Always show appreciation if someone else pays. You can say, "Thank you for dinner, I'd love to get the check next time." Tipping: Depending on the restaurant and service, tip the waiter well. In many places, a tip of 15-20% of the total bill is customary. Handle tipping discreetly to maintain a professional demeanor. If the service was bad: If the service was poor, you can reflect this in your tip, but still, maintain a level of fairness. Reducing the tip is acceptable, but avoid completely skipping it unless the service was extraordinarily bad. There are rules of etiquette that have nothing to do with the placement of the forks or remembering to say "please." When dining at a restaurant, these rules are often missed, and quite often, some diners need reminding. Honor your reservation. If you have a reservation, treat it like a commitment. Running late? Call the restaurant to let them know. Arriving on time avoids stress for everyone. Do not be rude to the staff if you're waiting too long. On busy nights, wait times can be just estimates. Be patient and understanding, the staff can't control how long others stay. Photograph etiquette. While it's tempting to snap photos of your meal, remember that flash photography can disturb other diners. Enjoy your food and share the memories later. Avoid blaming the server: If your meal isn't great, remember the server isn't responsible for kitchen issues. Voice your concerns calmly and tip based on the service, not the food quality. Tip generously: Using a coupon or special offer? Tip based on the original price. The staff works just as hard regardless of discounts. Respect Closing Times: Arriving just before closing time is inconsiderate. The staff lives outside of work too. Choose a restaurant that stays open later if you're dining late. The best dining etiquette can revolve around consideration and kindness. Restaurant work is tough, and a little etiquette can make everyone's experience better. Is it okay to take photos of my food at a restaurant? Yes, but be mindful of your surroundings. Avoid using flash as it can disturb other diners. Try to keep your photo-taking brief and discreet to maintain a pleasant dining atmosphere for everyone. How should I address a problem with my meal? Politely inform your server about the issue. Remember, they aren't responsible for what happens in the kitchen, but they can help address your concerns. Stay calm and courteous, and tip based on the service provided. Is it rude to arrive at a restaurant just before closing time? Yes, it's generally inconsiderate to arrive right before closing. The staff has other commitments and would appreciate finishing on time. Opt for a restaurant that stays open later if you're dining late. What should I do if my dining companion has poor table manners? Lead by example and maintain your own good manners. If appropriate, gently and privately suggest more courteous behavior. In a business setting, focus on your own etiquette to leave a positive impression. How can I improve my dining etiquette for business meals? Focus on being polite, attentive, and considerate. Follow basic table manners, engage in pleasant conversation, and avoid controversial topics. Your behavior at the table can leave a lasting impression, so stay professional and courteous. Remember to eat delicately and enjoyably to make a good impression on everyone around you! Here are some key takeaways to remember: Always finish chewing before speaking to avoid unpleasant sights and sounds. Politely ask someone to pass the item you need instead of reaching over. Always chew with your mouth closed to maintain a pleasant dining atmosphere. Place your napkin on your lap instead of tucking it into your shirt. Keep your elbows off the table to avoid appearing sloppy. Always thank your host or hostess for the meal and their hospitality. Wait for hot food to cool naturally or take small bites instead of blowing on it. Avoid making unnecessary noise with your dishes as it can be distracting and rude. Take small, manageable bites to prevent overfilling your mouth. Keep your hands and hair away from your face while eating. Even if you don't like a dish, refrain from making negative remarks. Wait until others have finished chewing before engaging in conversation. Familiarize yourself with the proper use of utensils for each meal. Avoid burping or belching; it's considered impolite. Keep your phone out of sight to avoid distractions and show respect for your dining companions. Good table manners are about showing respect and making everyone feel comfortable. By following these simple guidelines, you'll be a delightful guest at any dining event. So, the next time you're invited to dinner, relax and enjoy the company, knowing you've got the etiquette part down. Cheers! For more helpful tips on mastering tip etiquette, try this: Tipping Etiquette: Every Situation You'll Ever Need to Know Source: