

Business Deals and Bread Rolls

A Lesson in Dinner Etiquette

by L'Asia Brown

Each day, millions of people search for work in the United States and countless numbers of people get their applications thrown in the trash for the smallest reasons. Maybe they'd received a bad reference for coming to work late, or maybe they smelled like a pack of Newports on their interview with the manager. People are denied jobs for a variety of reasons, but the story of the young executive who didn't get the job because he took the wrong bread plate at a business dinner will make you want to sprint to the nearest bookstore and ravish the shelves for a book in dinner etiquette.

As part of the Black Executive Exchange Program, Fayetteville State University invited Sharon A. Hill, President of Sharon Hill International, to instruct several young, ambitious student leaders of FSU on proper dinner etiquette during a business meal. Hill, a critically acclaimed industry authority on etiquette, taught the guests everything from how to eat a bread roll to the proper way to wipe your mouth with a cloth napkin. In addition to her witty style of presentation and extensive personal experience, Hill encouraged and answered questions from students and "Beepers" (the executives who attended the program and dined with students). Students engaged in the actual process of receiving a three course meal from which they learned miniscule details which make major differences in

how interviewing managers and other executives judge and consider them as a prospective employee.

One of the first tips Hill rendered to the audience was the appropriate occasion for gentlemen to pull a chair out for a lady to be seated. "At social events the gentleman is expected to seat the lady, but in the business environment, because everyone is considered equal, the lady should seat herself." The table napkin, Hill emphasized, should be placed on the lap with the folded side towards the torso so the napkin resembles a triangle when looking down at it. A female student leader asked where to place a handbag, prompting Hill to suggest a handy trinket called a "purse hook hanger." The S shaped tool allows women to hang their purses on the table, avoiding the risk of germs on the bottom of their bags or theft of its contents. The hooks can be purchased for as low as \$4.00 and they come in an array of different colors and designs.

As students prepared to eat their salads, the direction in which to pass the condiments arose. "Counterclockwise," instructed Hill. While Hill's audience consumed the salad, the bread started to arrive which triggered the amusing story of the young executive who lost a job because he took a bread plate from an older, seasoned executive. "B&D or BMW are two things that can help you remember the order

of your plates," taught Hill. "Your bread plate is on the right and the drinking glasses are to your left." "BMW works the same way. The bread plate is to your far right, with the meal in the middle and drinking glass to the far left."

Several pointers given included, raising two fingers and making eye contact with the server for service, never chewing ice or interrupting another guest who may be engaging in prayer, avoiding messy entrees that may spill or soil your clothing, and the cardinal rule—turning cell phones OFF or explaining yourself prior to the arrival of the food if you are expecting an important call. Hill advised not to order wine, but to leave this decision to the hostess of the dinner and to avoid tipping, since it is customary for the hostess to do this also.

When picturing the image of etiquette dinner training, one may conjure up a stuffy room filled with black ties and expensive cocktail dresses with guests at a dead silence trying their hardest to appear "cultured." This dinner was nothing of the sort, with Sharon Hill making her audience as comfortable as possible with a sense of humor, and a lesson that will ensure students are conditioned well enough to dine with the best in business.

Using Those Interview Skills



A representative from the Social Security Administration speaks with an interested FSU Student.

photo by Tia Gilliam