

Lynda Goldman's Business Image Tips
Gender Issues: Should You or Shouldn't You?

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Dear Networker,
Who should extend their hand first at a business meeting, a man or a woman? Should a man pull out a chair for a woman, or hold open a door? Should a woman stand up when someone enters the room?

Whew, the business world has gotten confusing. The rules of social etiquette, with men taking care of women, don't apply to the new workplace. Some of these rules are changing on the social scene as well.

Here are some basics to help you avoid faux pas and bad feeling on the job.

The handshake: In the past, it used to be that a man waited for the women to extend her hand. Today, the person of higher rank usually initiates the handshake. Sometimes this doesn't happen, because people are unsure of the rules. In that case, anyone can extend his or her hand. You show confidence when you are the first to extend your hand for a handshake.

Making introductions: Business is gender-neutral, and introductions are based on hierarchy. When you introduce two people, say the name of the person higher in rank first, to show respect. For example, Ms. VP, I'd like you to meet Ms. Manager.

Greeting people: In the past, men stood up to greet someone, but women did not. Again, the rules have changed. When someone enters the room, or you are introduced to someone, women as well as men should stand up to shake hands or greet the person. Imagine the scenario when there are several men and one or two women at a meeting when the president of the company enters the room. If all the men stand up, and the women remain seated, the women will seem less important, or not part of the group.

Salutations: 'Dear Sir' doesn't apply anymore as a generic salutation, since about half of the workforce is now female. You can try, 'Dear Sir/Ms', but a

better solution is to: a. Find out the name of the person you are writing to, or b. Use a gender-neutral salutation, such as 'Dear customer' or 'Dear Colleague.'

Ordering food: Everyone orders his or her own food. The guest orders first. When you are the host, invite your guest to order first. If you are a female host, and the waiter turns to you first, you can say something like, 'Please take my guest's order first.' This will also ensure that the waiter knows you are the host, and will bring you the bill at the end of the meal.

Paying the bill: At a business dinner, the host (the person who issues the invitation) pays the bill, regardless of gender. If a man makes a move to pay the bill when dining with a woman who invited him, the woman can say, 'The is on XYZ company.' If someone insists on paying the bill, don't make a fuss and risk a scene or hurt feelings. Let the person pay.

Opening doors, carrying packages: Use common sense. If someone needs help opening a door, pulling out a chair, carrying a box, or putting on a winter coat, offer to help, regardless of gender.