

MANNERS MATTER

Dubai-based Lebanese national, Balsam Al Khalil, is the Chief Representative Officer for Bank of Beirut in the UAE and the Gulf region. Besides holding a law degree, Al-Khalil studied etiquette for fashion, food and travel in addition to fashion styling and image consultancy, at London College of Fashion and the Finishing Touch Academy, Dubai. An avid traveller, she has recently authored a pocket-sized book *Travel Etiquette, a Guide for the Modern Traveller*, launched both in Dubai and Beirut, and the guide is already in its second print. In an exclusive interview with *Panorama* she talks about food, fashion and travel etiquette.

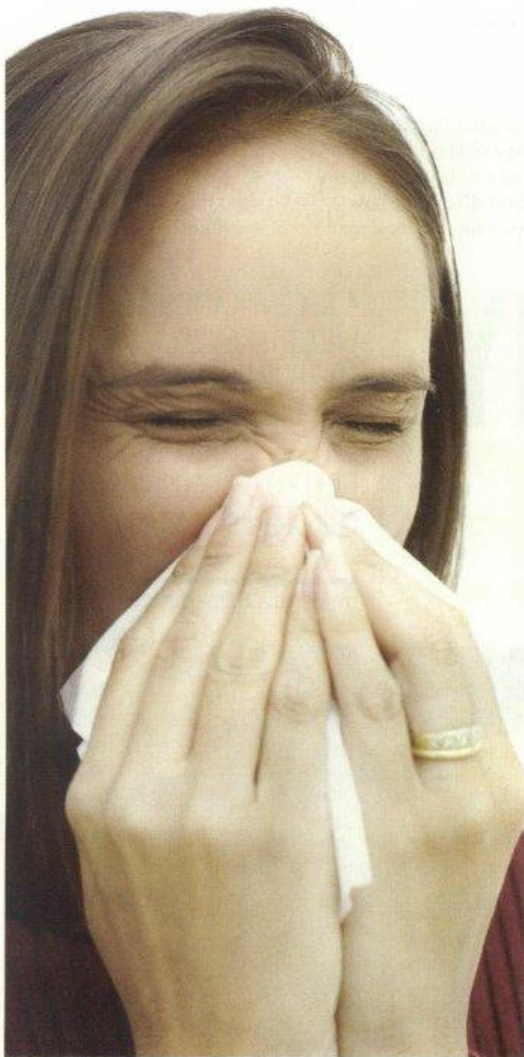
What's the role of etiquette in society and professional life?
It is very unfortunate that the word "etiquette"

is often misunderstood and taken as the right way of using a fork and knife. In fact, etiquette is a way of life. It is a set of rules consisting of good manners and its role is to improve our image since our manners define who we are. If we treat people with respect, regardless of their age, gender or background, it would reflect positively on us.

Has the value of etiquette diminished?
Although you still find some cultures laying stress on good manners, generally it is sad indeed that the value of proper manners has been diluted, although it was supposed to be otherwise with globalisation.

How have the rules of good manners changed over the years? Are we giving up our traditional etiquette in favour of a Western model?
Well, the changes are felt on a daily basis and unfortunately not for the

ETIQUETTE IS NOT JUST LEARNING TO USE CUTLERY THE PROPER WAY, SAYS IMAGE CONSULTANT AND ETIQUETTE SPECIALIST BALSAM AL KHALIL



Al Khalil laments that many people fail to cover their mouth while sneezing, coughing and yawning.

better. Opening doors for ladies is almost a vanishing habit, so is giving away your seat to an elderly or a pregnant lady on a bus. Speaking loudly in public places, or even cursing, is almost becoming a normal practice. We don't even see people covering their

mouths any more while coughing, sneezing or yawning!

Could we have some examples of traditional Arab etiquette not being followed by the younger generation?

Youngsters used to call

or visit friends and relatives during the holy month of Ramadan or the Eid holidays. Now, this habit has been replaced by sending electronic messages. Even the practice of kissing the hands of the elderly and taking their blessings during such occasions is almost vanishing.

You have studied fashion styling and image consultancy in London and Dubai. How did the courses help you?

Studying etiquette, followed by fashion styling, opened my eyes to many things and let me look at things from a different perspective. In fact, I am in the process of obtaining masters in Protocol by this summer.

How important is it for entrepreneurs to be well-versed in corporate protocol? Personally, what kind of behaviour puts you off?

It is very important in my opinion as people get attracted to politeness, good manners and a well-groomed image.

Rudeness and arrogance put me off. Greeting and meeting people politely, listening to them and taking their views into consideration costs nothing. On the contrary, it always leads to a win-win situation.

Your last word on the subject.

Respect people and treat them as you wish to be treated yourself.

BASIC ETIQUETTE TIPS

FASHION

Dress your best without overdoing it and according to the time, place and occasion.

Work place calls for a decent attire, while day wear calls for casuals which should be always smart – you never know who you might meet on the way.

Evening wear depends on the occasion and whether it is outdoors or indoors. "Black tie" is strictly long dresses and very formal wear.

FOOD

Always remember the golden rule to avoid an embarrassment. What you drink is on your right side and what you eat is on your left side.

Cutlery is to be used from the far outer end to the last inner end.

If you feel unsure about anything, watch people around you before you start.

TRAVEL

Check and research the culture, code of conduct and dress before your travel. You can always get away with modesty and decency.

Never assume that local residents might understand English. But "thank you" and "please," accompanied with a smile, are universally understood.

Always show respect to others' time and belongings.

Local residents of any country can tell that you are a tourist and will spare no effort to help, if you are polite and modest.