

DIANA MATHER

BRINGS POLISHED PERFECTION TO DUBAI



'Elegance is not an on-off switch; it is a way of life!'



Though times have changed, the importance of presenting yourself in the best possible light is still as high as ever. Regardless of your job or background, basic etiquette and manners are fundamental, but while standing out in a crowd can come easily to some, for others creating a positive first impression is a learnable skill. That's where the wonderful, and wonderfully British, Diana Mather comes in. Diana is the Senior tutor at The English Manner, a Middle East Academy based in Dubai offering one-day Essential Social Etiquette workshops for today's modern woman.

With over twenty years of correcting diplomats, foreign royalty and many others with their 'p's and q's', a few hours with Diana will have you ready to face any social or business occasion with ease and poise. **HELLO!** chats to the former television presenter to ask all those niggling questions about dinner party etiquette, what we should absolutely avoid talking about at social gatherings and which celebrities could benefit from some lessons in old-school charm.....

Welcome back to Dubai! When were you last here?
 "Thank you...I was last in Dubai in April running the first tranche of our etiquette courses for our new Middle East Academy, and I'm thrilled to be back to run the next group of classes with my colleague William Hanson. I have also visited Dubai on holiday several years ago – a lot has changed since then!"

Will you get a chance to play tourist while you're here? And where do you want to visit?
 "I hope I will, although I know that I have a very busy schedule. I'd love to go and visit the souks again."

Why have you launched etiquette workshops in Dubai?

"We have had a lot of interest via the website, so together with our Middle East Academy director, Paula Mellor, we felt that there was a good market in Dubai for our courses. Dubai is a rapidly growing economy and a big player now in the global marketplace and people recognise the need to learn international skills."

What are the key lessons students will take away from the workshops?

"Fundamentally, it is about respect and

confidence. We are a much smaller world than we were 50 years ago and it is very important to know international business etiquette. By taking one of our courses, whether in the UK, China, Africa or UAE, we are helping people to go effortlessly into any social or business situation and know they can interact with style, good manners and confidence."

Are you always surprised by the lack of etiquette students have at the start of your workshops?

"Sometimes we do train people whose etiquette is a little patchy, but in general we get nice people who want to be nicer. Where we find the manners are often the worst is with high-flying businessmen and women who have become complacent about their interpersonal skills!"

Can you only be elegant in elegant surroundings?

"Whilst elegant surroundings can help, you can be elegant even in a burger bar! Elegance is not an on-off switch; it is a way of life!"

What valuable lessons should we pass onto our children about manners?

"We must teach them the values of respect and courtesy. Not just respect for others, but self-respect as well."

Do you have any embarrassing stories from your days at society parties?

"It's not so much embarrassing, but quite amusing. I was once hosting a dinner party and the chimney collapsed mid-evening and the drawing room caught fire. Whilst the firemen got to work, we carried on with our dinner next door in the dining room as if nothing was happening."

Have you met any celebrities with terrible manners?

"Yes, but discretion permits me from saying who!"

Who is the most elegant celebrity you've ever met?
 "Princess Diana was extremely elegant and Omar Sharif is both elegant and charming."

Are there any celebrities you'd like to enroll on your etiquette workshops?

"We have two television reality shows in the UK called *The Only Way is Essex* and *Made in Chelsea*. I think each cast would keep us in business for quite some time. The boy band Oasis could do with some help too!"

Are your workshops only for those wishing to be in the spotlight?

"Not at all! Most of our students just wish to add

some polish to their social lives or professional careers in order to gain confidence or a competitive professional edge."

What is your biggest dinner party faux pas?

"There are so many to choose from! I think ignoring one of the two people seated next to you all evening is pretty rude. Really you should alternate between the person on your left and right as each course progresses to make sure you speak to them both equally... even if one of them is deadly dull!"

How can we throw a successful dinner party?

"Plan, consider your guests and their needs, and remain calm. Imagine a swan; graceful above the water, but frantically working under the surface. My colleague says that if you enjoy your own dinner party too much then it probably means that there's a guest somewhere whose glass is empty, or who is wondering where the loos are."

Is there a lost art with writing thank you letters?

"Yes, and they are so simple. There should be no excuse for not putting pen to paper and writing a few lines to thank someone for their hospitality or gift. A thank you text or email is better than no thank you at all, but not the same as a proper letter."

Has social networking ruined the art of conversation?

"It's not helping, that's for sure. Facebook and the like should be there to complement our social lives, not replace it."

At a party or event, what subjects of conversation should we stay clear of?

"Avoid talking about sex, health, religion or money. Money is the biggest no-no. At a social gathering, avoid asking someone what job they do, we should be defined by our personalities and who we are, not our jobs and how much we earn. But if they tell you what they do, then that's fine. Discuss away!"

How different is etiquette in the workplace?

"Some of the rules change slightly, but in essence they are very similar. As the workplace gets more competitive (especially in a weaker economy) professional politesse seems to have gone by the way side. We may be in an economic recession but there's no need for a recession where manners are concerned!" **H**

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