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FIU gives class in `class'

FIU student athletes, soon to graduate, learned the etiquette of business networking, handshaking and, not incidentally, got a free lunch.

By **FRED TASKER**
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Teacher poses problem: You're at an office party and the boss walks in. You know you need to shake hands, but your hand is wet from holding an icy drink. What do you do?

Student Adam Gorman, grinning, reaches over and pretends to wipe his hand on the shirt of fellow student Edward Wenger. Teacher's first mistake, it seems, was seating these two together. They're football players, part of a classroom full of Florida International University athletes taking a course titled "Business Etiquette and Dining Protocol."

"No, Adam, that's *not* what you do," sighs Pauline Winick, teacher and co-owner of The Protocol Centre, based in Coral Gables, brought in to smooth out the pending graduates' edges for life in the world of business. "I can see you guys are going to be trouble."

IMPORTANCE OF COUTH

Winick explains the importance of learning some couth: "The minute you leave the university, you'll be out in a competitive world. We're going to show you how to outclass the competition."

Turning to the essential art of handshakes, Winick calls Wenger to the front of the class for a demonstration. She grasps his hand and says, "In the Middle East it's customary for men to hug, even to kiss each other on both cheeks."

Wenger looks around in panic.

Moving on to how to make small talk at business networking events, Winick says: "You can talk about school, where you're from, the weather, your job. But you never just say 'Hi.'"

She looks around: "What else might you say?"

Gorman suggests: "How about 'sup?' "

Winick glares good-humoredly: "Add that to 'Hi.'"

DINING PROTOCOL

The class turns to Dining Protocol, and Protocol Centre co-owner Dale Webb takes over.

She and Winick formed the company last year after decades working separately.

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Winick was associate vice president of marketing at FIU and executive vice president of the Miami Heat. Webb was FIU's vice president of advancement and of external relations.

Webb talks the students through a proper business dinner:

- Issue a verbal invitation followed by a written one; no e-mail.
- If you're the host, especially if you're a woman, slip a credit card to the *matre d'* before dinner to avoid a tussle over the check at meal's end.
- If you're male, do not pull out a chair for a woman. "In business, women and men are equal," Webb tells them. "Social etiquette is based on chivalry; business etiquette is based on hierarchy."
- If you're female, and a man incorrectly pulls out a chair for you, accept the gesture and say, "Thank you." And be gracious about it.

Inviting the students into a dining hall, Winick and Webb let them practice on a real, four-course lunch of soup, chicken, roast potatoes, vegetable strips, pear salad and dessert.

The hardest part is dining "continental" style -- cutting the food with knife in right hand, bringing morsel to mouth with fork in left hand. Wenger struggles; Winick helps him get his fingers in the right places, urging, "Stroke, stroke."

Winick is sympathetic: "These Gen X-ers and Y-ers have never had formal meals. With so many working mothers and single mothers, most of them were not raised in nuclear families that were used to sitting down and eating together."

But Wenger is smooth as glass when asked to make a toast.

"I'm coach Don Strock," he intones. Gesturing to a student table-mate, he continues. "I'd like to welcome our honored guest, Dan Marino."

DESSERT TIPS

When dessert arrives, teachers prompt the proper form: Cut the pie with dessert fork, bring it to mouth with dessert spoon. Wenger accomplishes it with perhaps more speed than form.

"Ed, you're done already?" Winick exclaims.

Wenger looks sheepish as she brings him another serving of pie and ice cream so he can continue practicing.

But as she steps away, he grins to his table-mates: "I scored."

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