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By Sara J. Welch

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Melanie Donnelly (center), labor relations manager, America's Center, St. Louis

Mind Your Ps and Qs



Suzanne Willis' grandmother, affectionately known as Mimi, was a stickler for good manners. Mimi taught her grandchildren the basics of etiquette with charming hints such as reminding them to "E's off" when they had their elbows on the table in public (E for elbows). The gentleness of her reminders was another important lesson: When those you are with have poor manners, be careful not to embarrass them.

Willis parlayed her knowledge into a fun and rewarding job teaching "Mimi's Manners" etiquette classes for children at the Ritz-Carlton, Naples, where she also serves as area director of public relations, and has since received formal education as a graduate of the Protocol School of Palm Beach. "My grandmother was just fabulous with manners so I thought, how wonderful to create something in her honor," says Willis. "I created the children's etiquette class at the Ritz about three years ago and it grew from there. First, wives asked, 'Do you have something for men? Because my husband could surely benefit from something like this.' I now have a teenager's class as well."

Willis' men's program, called "Oh, Behave!," and her class for recent graduates, "Graduation Class," have become just as successful and popular as the original children's program and Willis now travels to speak to professionals as well with her "Business Etiquette for Peak Performance" class. Lessons can include a myriad of topics such as table manners, proper introductions, cell phone and e-mail etiquette, and how best to navigate a room during a business function.

"One of the most common business etiquette questions is 'How do I know which is my drink glass and bread plate?,'" says Willis, who acknowledges that the situation can be confusing, particularly at large, round tables with tight seating. "The answer: Eat left; drink right. Or I like to share the 'b' and the 'd' example. When you make an 'okay' symbol with both hands and hold your three fingers straight and together, the left hand makes a 'b' and your bread plate will be on your left. The right hand makes a 'd' and the right side is where you'll find your drink."

She's done both lecture and interactive classes for business professionals. "Everyone learns better when they experience something for themselves," she says, which is why she enjoys teaching during meals and with other engaging elements. "I also speak to large groups using PowerPoint presentations. Even in that environment, it is very interactive—people always have a question they've always wanted to have answered. I like to make the classes fun."

By Kinley Levack

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DIALING IN

Fee: \$2,500 and up, plus expenses (varies depending on group size and travel)

Contact: (339) 287-7070



The woman who started it all: Mimi (center) surrounded by her grandchildren