



Evolution of Etiquette

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About the Tutorial

Etiquette is often mistaken for “mere table manners” but if we look at it from a broad prospective, the etiquettes a person practices tells us about his qualities and adequacies. A person with a good set of etiquette not only leaves a lasting impression, but also makes sure that he leads his life as an example to the ones in his family life and the workplace.

Experts state that with the advent of culture, social etiquette underwent evolution along three main categories – Hygiene, Courtesy, and Cultural norms. In this tutorial, we will discuss in detail how etiquette evolved along these three categories.

Audience

Having good etiquettes and practicing them in social gatherings makes a person behave in a professional manner and respond to situations in the most appropriate manner possible. This tutorial is meant for all those readers who want to understand the bigger picture of Etiquette and its evolution as a whole. It less about what etiquettes to follow, and more about how etiquette started, how it has evolved over the years, and how it's going to change in the future.

Prerequisites

Before proceeding with this tutorial, you are expected to know that this tutorial doesn't cover the different etiquettes of dining, greeting, and other activities that are practiced all over the world. Each country may have its different set of etiquettes, however, this tutorial addresses only the common ones.

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1. Etiquette – Introduction

Etiquettes is a set of guidelines that, when followed properly, creates a positive impression in the minds of the people you interact with. In addition to that, etiquettes also make a person behave in a professional manner and respond to situations in the most appropriate manner possible.

The word “etiquette” comes from the old French term **estiquette** which meant “ticket, label”. This development comes from the then-common practice of carrying cards printed with instructions on how to maintain proper behavior in courts. Later, the rich and elite decided to use this method.

Instead of sending an invitation card which just mentioned the date and timing of the party, they started adding additional information on the different courses, a map of the mansion, where to park their carriages, etc. Others followed suit and soon public houses carried a set of instructions on their entrance doors on what conduct they expect their visitors to follow.

Later the pronunciation of the word changed from **estiquette** to **etiquette**, which was the result of vowel-corruption. Because the usage of this word was not limited to cards anymore, and a few standards that were hitherto followed only in elite households had now become part of everyday life, “etiquette” gradually changed to accommodate represent the term “prescribed behavior”.

Etiquette vs. Manners vs. Courtesy

Because it’s used interchangeably in conversations, many people tend to do mistakes between the usage of words “etiquette”, “manners”, and “courtesy”. Let’s find out what they mean:

Courtesy

Courtesy is the act of being polite and doing what the person thinks is the right thing at the given time. Earlier, the act of offering one’s seat to a lady passenger was considered a courtesy, however these stances undergo change with the advancing of time. A modern day example of courteous behavior would be keeping the door of an automatic-operated lift open for a colleague to be able to walk inside the lift.

Etiquette

It is the code of conduct that people in different social circles are expected to adhere to. It’s a set of instructions that might not be written out, but are paid equal importance to written rules. Etiquette specifies how a person should behave in a given circle so as to leave a positive impression on everyone present.

Manners

Manners is a neutral word, which means it in itself means only “actions”. That’s the reason we use the words “good, bad” before them to give them a direction. So when you get irritated by someone being impolite and angrily ask him “Don’t you have any manners!” and he replied “Yes”, he could actually be right.

Everyone has manners, but depending on the upbringing, environment, and education, he could have either good manners or bad ones. In short, etiquette teaches us how we should behave, and manners are how we ultimately do.

2. Etiquette – Evolution

The term “etiquette” might have been a recent development, however evolutionists like **Charles Darwin** had not only identified etiquette as a universal trait but had also found out the motive behind it. He had observed a universality in the way faces of people respond to sights or thoughts or shame, disgust, anger, sorrow, etc. These expressions were not picked up at adulthood or any particular stage of human growth.

In fact, he found that even babies universally responded to stress, pain, and joy in the same ways.

- From all the newborn babies that he had observed, none used frowns to express happiness, or smiles to mark displeasure.
- All of the infants used the same set of expressions, almost as if reading it from a template embedded in their DNA.

Using this observation, he concluded that such responses are not learnt from watching others but are innate. Furthermore, it was concluded that these responses were the consequences of development of the human behavior.

Helena Curtis, a noted evolutionist mentions that etiquette was not only a social mandate, but also a survival tactic. From observing birds, she could determine that those who maintained hygiene, and were polite, stood the highest chance of survival and reproduction.

Similarly, **Steven Neuberg** writes in his book, “*Handbook of Social Psychology*” that animals and birds taught etiquette to their young to hand over the experience they have gotten in their lives, so that the young can now preserve manners. Through etiquette, they were able to teach their offspring certain norms which help them survive in a group, where some of the members are physically stronger than them. This was the beginning of the evolution of etiquette where animals and birds started following the etiquette handed over to them by their parents and noticing similar manners in others to identify who they can trust and who they can't.

The proverb “birds of the same feather flock together” doesn't only include feathers but mannerisms as well. A group of pigeons will also have many small groups within them depending on the way they study the manners (read etiquette) of other birds. This helped them keep safe, as in the case of attacks, like-minded people would group together and fight as a unit.

Similar traits may be witnessed in people who are strict with home-rules where children are not allowed to stay out after dark. They might justify it under the pretext of “this is what children from respectable families don't do”, thereby getting the advantage of not having to discuss the possible consequences of roaming around late at night (robbery, assault, etc.) by linking it with etiquette.

Thus, etiquette can be described as a set of norms and specific manners derived from observation and experience that were laid down from a desire to achieve convenience and better lifestyle.

3. Hygiene-concomitant Etiquette

Experts state that with the advent of culture, social etiquette underwent evolution along three main categories, each of these categories were centered around specific themes that regulated the way people maintained their personal and social lives.

These three categories are:

- Hygiene
- Courtesy
- Cultural norms

Hygiene was centered around sanitation and cleanliness which protect people from diseases, courtesy was centered around survival and social acceptance, whereas cultural norms were established to feel protected in the company of like-minded individuals.

This was termed as **concomitance** which means, coming into existence as the consequence of an action. Since all three fields are vital to a person's life, one can understand how encompassing etiquettes are in a person's life.

Hygiene-concomitant Etiquette was evolved from the need to teach manners to others that prevents disease and its transmission. These etiquettes are taught at a young age, especially as the children are the most vulnerable to diseases and inculcating good hygiene at a young age is going to build a healthy habit in them.

On asking children at the age of 12 as to why they were tucking their napkins before drinking soup, sneezing into their handkerchiefs, while others are simply sneezing and coughing into the air, they will all just say "Momma taught us so". When they are asked why did their mothers teach them that, they would probably draw blanks. By the time people reach puberty, they realize the reason behind why their parents asked them to follow certain codes, however till that time, etiquettes can keep them safe.

Parental discipline and a healthy growing environment is crucial for the success of this etiquette. The purpose is to make these etiquettes a part of their nature by the time they reach adulthood through constant application and practice.

Depending on different households, different children will have different etiquettes like not making a lot of noise at the dining table, not talking with food in mouth, or never sharing a handkerchief with someone else, however schools have now laid down a uniform set of guidelines on hygiene etiquette.



Here is a list of some of such most basic hygiene etiquettes:

- Using facial tissues to wipe respiratory secretions.
- Disposing facial tissues in appropriate receptacles.
- Covering the mouth and nose during coughing and sneezing.
- Disinfecting hands after accidental contact with respiratory secretions.
- Keeping a distance of at least 3 feet from others while coughing and sneezing.

4. Courtesy-concomitant Etiquette

Courtesy is one of the most important necessities of social life. The word **courtesy** itself comes from being courteous, or courtly, a direct reference to the dignified manner in which proceedings were continued in courts of that time. Being courteous means being considerate and helping while interacting with people.

Courtesy-concomitant etiquette is a set of etiquettes that is about putting one's own interests in the backseat and help people in their actions. These etiquettes help to create a positive impression in the minds of people and helps in building trust in social circles. A courteous person is able to get the maximum benefits of living in a society by regulating his interests and that of others. For example, things like allowing a handicapped person before you at a queue or keeping a lift open for your colleague could sound like small actions but they leave a big lasting impression in the minds of people.

Courtesy-concomitant etiquette is the only one where even hygiene-concomitant etiquette can take a back-seat. A guy can offer his handkerchief (**which has to be clean**) to someone who has cut himself badly and is desperately looking for something to dress the wound, or offer his jacket to a friend if he is feeling cold and the owner of the jacket could do without it for the time-being.

The failure in implementing courtesy-concomitant etiquette leads to social rejection from peers. Employees often complain of not getting promoted to managerial positions even if having excellent performances and knowing their job inside-out. However, most of such cases are due to their perceived lack of social etiquette.

Case Study – Korean Air Flight 801 Air-crash

In the 90s, Korean Air has a fearsome reputation of being one of the most unsafe airlines in the entire world. With around 20 crashes, it was leading an infamous chart of airlines who had involved in the most number of crashes ever. When it was evident that the airlines had earned enough bad name for itself in its 10 years of functioning that other airlines do in many decades, the management decided to employ experts to understand the working of the staff.

It's not that the management was callous in their attitude or were not concerned about the crashes; they were making the mistake of going for the obvious areas that companies generally look into when they face such crisis, i.e. engine, machinery, untrained pilots, etc. In short, they were thinking that the issues media usually reports on in such scenarios, like old planes, unqualified staff, communication gaps, etc. However, it's interesting to note that they were not facing any technical issues, but an extremely rigid and strict etiquette based on hierarchy.

In a find that many people found absurd and extremely hard to believe at first, it stated that the crashes were the result of a strict hierarchical structure of etiquette, in which Koreans are expected to be deferential to their elders in a way that's unthinkable in any other part of the world.

Koreans follow a strict etiquette of conversation within their families and with people depending on their seniority, relationships, ranks, orders and authority levels. Koreans follow six distinct levels of conversation which are developed as per hierarchy, even for members of the same family, depending on their relationship and seniority.

For example, a Korean would speak in one way to his father, another way with his grandfather, and in a completely different way with his son. He will have a different manner of communication with an elder sibling as compared to a younger one. While this hierarchy was designed around the concept of respect to one's family-members, it also had a telling role to play in the 1997 air-crash of Korean Air Flight 801, which is one of the worst accidents ever in the history of aviation.

Korean Air Flight 801 Air-crash

On the fateful morning of August 6, 1997, Korean Air Flight 801 flew into Nimitz Hill, which was more than five kilometers away from the runway to Antonio B. Won Pat International Airport, of Guam, USA, killing 223 out of the 254 passengers on board at the crash site. Most of these were vacationers and honeymooners.

While investigating the crash, it was revealed that the accident was caused due to the Captain taking faulty readings from a malfunctioning altitude indicator. However, the interesting thing was that the first officer's altitude indicator was working fine, yet he failed to convey to the Captain that the flight was being jeopardized due his faulty calculations.

In a series of shocking disclosures, the flight's voice recorder revealed that when the first officer realized that the plane had entered turbulence, **he still couldn't muster the courage** to break the etiquette of communication hierarchy and confront the Captain directly on his taking the wrong decision.

In addition to that, Korean Air had a policy of recruiting pilots who previously were in the air-force, which reinforced an even stricter hierarchical structure of communication. This is the reason none of the subordinates could dare question the decisions of the Captain, who was at his wits' end and had unleashed such a climate of fear and agitation in the cockpit that even when the first officer realized that the plane was descending very steeply, he preferred to keep his mouth shut.

Etiquette of Communication to blame?

Many people, especially those in the West, were reluctant to buy the entire concept of someone adhering to a strict code of etiquette even when facing a swiftly impending life-and-death scenario, however their opinions in the face of facts that kept piling on to support this singular incident.

The Captain of the flight was a 42-year old person with close to 9000 hours of flight time. The first officer, at 40 years, was only two years younger than the Captain. Interesting still is the fact that the flight engineer was 57 years old and had more flight hours under his belt than that of both the Captain and the First Officer combined. Yet such was their adherence to respecting their authority that none of them could openly point him out his mistake.

In accordance to the findings in this audit, Korean Air made vast changes to its HR practices and training routines. Flight officers weren't hired from the military any more, all training procedures were designed in such a way that there can be a free flow of conversation between different ranks of officers, keeping mutual respect intact.

Strict Etiquette of Communication

Following the changes made to Korean Air's policies, many such worksheets were designed and given to all the staff to understand what their understanding of etiquette is:

1. If a co-worker of lower rank waves his hand and asks "How are you?"

- a. You tell him to mind his manners
- b. Saying "I am good, thank you."
- c. Ignore him and continue walking
- d. Give him a slight nod and maintain authoritative body language.

2. It is appropriate to stand close to a senior co-worker while talking:

- a. Yes
- b. Never
- c. If it's a close friend.
- d. Not if it's a co-worker from another department

3. A co-worker walks to your cubicle with a friend and wants to introduce:

- a. He should immediately introduce your friend to you.
- b. He should immediately introduce you to his friend.
- c. He should first converse with me and then introduce his friend.
- d. He should inform me before bringing his friend to meet me.

4. You have a scheduled appointment; however, you have been waiting:

- a. Open the door and say "Excuse me".
- b. Stand by the door so that the person you came to meet sees you.
- c. Keep waiting for some more time, and then leaving with a note.
- d. Walk in confidently, introduce yourself, and mention your appointment.

5. To convey thanks to someone, it is appropriate to:

- a. Send him a gift with a note.
- b. Drop by the office and ask him out for lunch or coffee.
- c. Send him flowers to his home
- d. Give him a call.

6. A man should wait for the woman to initiate a handshake in meeting:

- a. Always
- b. Never
- c. Not if she is a subordinate
- d. Not if she is a co-worker with same rank.

7. Breaking the ice by discussing the weather, politics and traffic is okay:

- a. Always
- b. Never
- c. Only if the person is a subordinate
- d. Only if the person is a co-worker of same rank.

8. When sending an email to a business contact, you should:

- a. Be as formal as if it were a letter written on paper.
- b. Follow a relaxed yet formal writing style reflective of the writing medium.
- c. Be as formal as possible and keep the email related to facts and pointers.
- d. Keep it short, to the point, and evoke a response.

9. It's okay to take calls on your personal phone during office hours:

- a. Never
- b. Always
- c. Not in a meeting
- d. Not when people are around

10.If a colleague shares a rumor with you:

- a. You pass the rumor on
- b. Try to corroborate the facts on your own
- c. Ask colleagues related information to check it
- d. Keep the information to yourself and reprimand the employee

What was amazing on analyzing the results was that majority of the staff members had a very "black and white" thinking in the way they answered the questions. Most of the pilots answered either in the absolute affirmative "Always", or the absolute negative "Never".

Some chose to maintain a balance between the extremes, however very few among these were from the in-flight staff. Keeping this in mind, many changes were incorporated into the airlines. The results of such sweeping measures was that since this aftermath, Korean Air has not faced a single fatal accident of this nature, apart from the isolated incident years later in 2007, when a plane landed on a taxiway instead of the intended runway. Even in that case, this was a non-fatal accident and there was no injury to anyone aboard the plane.

5. Cultural-concomitant Etiquette

Cultural-concomitance Etiquette is a result of a person's desire to have an independent identity in a society with various cultural representatives. It helps them to identify people who have respect for some cultural values and forge relationships with them.

Cultural Etiquettes are a set of manners that people learn from their family members through the process of observation, adherence, and routinization. After a few days, these actions become familiar to them and are perceived as second nature. At this stage, interacting with people of foreign cultures will make them aware of these people being "others".



Non-adherence of cultural etiquette often leads to identity crises and alienation. People who completely disown their native culture and start miming the new culture they live in, in an effort to be one in a foreign country, often start developing strong emotions of longing to be among people of their culture.

Cultural Etiquette of Honor

In three separate observation-based experiments conducted over a group of people in the US, it was found out that the southern states practice a strong etiquette of honor which is unique to them, and is the result of their history and lineage.

People were profiled based on their native states, and were made participants, unknown to them, in a social experiment. The scientists introduced themselves to these unsuspecting people as a

“team of dieticians, nutritionists and doctors” who wanted volunteers to participate in a monitoring exercise, where the subjects will be wired to machines that will read their heart-beat, breathing rate, etc. after they have walked a few kilometers.

All of them agreed to this seemingly-innocent exercise, and a walking route was mapped out to them. However, the actual play was to plant a reckless person coming from the opposite direction on the same walking route, who would first deliberately bump into them while the participants were walking on the pavement, and then abuse them verbally using expletives.

It was noted that while northerners seemed relatively unaffected by the ugly experience, and were quite happy to shrug off the entire thing as one bad episode and move on, many southerners immediately took offense and took retaliatory steps like engaging in abusing back, reprimanding, or – as in extreme cases – engaging in fisticuffs.



On checking the readings of the machines, there was a significant rise in their cortisone levels and testosterone levels, indicating that they were upset and getting primed up for aggression. On asking them what got them so riled up, all of their answers gave sufficient clue that they felt their masculinity was threatened. All over the United States, many such incidents have occurred over the years, where violent crimes have been conducted even when the incident that triggered it wouldn't be so serious.

The Code of Honor

Offenses like murder have been committed because of incidents like calling names, verbal abuses, which may sound trivial to many people but not to the people who participated in them. Anthropologists have termed this as **The Code of Honor**.

Social Scientists have developed a number of explanations for people from the Southern states living by this code of honor, and many agree that this goes back in history to those years when settlers of South, having come from fringe societies of Britain, were used to lawlessness and clan rule.

In absence of any law-enforcing body, they taught their children to keep his honor intact and be prepared for offensive defense to protect it. Honor wasn't an emotion but a sign of masculine strength and warrior virtue. It was seen as a survival instinct. If a guy was perceived as "someone who can be pushed around", then the word would go around that he won't be able to make it much longer. This sense of attaching manly attributes to defending one's honor made even children lash out at people with savage anger, if they thought something was offensive to them. This was due to generations of teaching the concept of retributive justice, which was followed for decades.

Even till as recent as the 1940's, it was almost impossible to get someone sentenced for murder in the Southern courts if the convict claimed that he killed the person for insulting him. Even the southern males, who didn't generally endorse violence or participate in violent activities, would think that using violence to "defend one's honor, possession, property, and family" was justified.

Case Study: IBM's Forage into Culture-concomitant Etiquette

Geert Hofstede, a prominent Dutch social psychologist, used data collected from the employee surveys that IBM had conducted over a period of time in over 50 countries and found a clear and pronounced influence of different culture-concomitant etiquettes that influence the working of a multi-cultural organization.

IBM employs more than 116,000 employees worldwide. When all these employees were asked various questions, it was found out that they functioned around four distinct etiquettes:

- Reverence to Authority
- Individual vs. Collective Identity
- Preference for Risk-taking
- Sense of Masculinity / Femininity

Reverence to Authority

Employees from cultures where reverence to authority is second nature, like the Malaysians and the Koreans, there is a strict code of respect given to seniors. This reverence to authority is visible not only in seniority of designation but also age. This however doesn't mean that the person in a higher designation or of an older age gets to treat the juniors with indifference. There is a mutual respect for each other's dignity.

In sharp contrast, there are cultures such as Denmark where reverence to authority is not practiced on such strict lines. Danish are more relaxed in their approach towards seniority, and find it uncomfortable dealing with people with a strong sense of organizational rank from them. They are more comfortable with an organizational style that allows them a greater participation in decision-making.

Individual vs. Collective Identity

Individualist cultures give more preference to having and cultivating an individual sense of identity, responsibility, and success as compared to experiencing all this as members of a group. Members who are from individualist cultures like the UK practice relaxed social connections, prioritize their individual rights and independence, and aim for personal achievements.



As a counterpoint, collectivist societies such as Venezuela give more importance to what a team achieved, as compared to individual achievements. For them, if a team wins everyone wins. A good performer will feel like a loser if his team doesn't win. Collectivists value loyalty more than anything, and focus all their actions towards meeting the ends of some groups, such as family, friends, or colleagues. However, what makes France unique is they give equal respect to both individual rights as well as the rights of different societies.

Preference for Risk-taking

There are a few societies, like those in Singapore where people know how to deal with uncertainties and ambiguity, hence they are open to risk-taking and are more receptive to new ideas, which is something very difficult to find in Greek people who tend to avoid any project that has a few uncertain parameters.

Greeks covet dependability and structured plans, and it reflects in their explicitly-drawn social etiquette and laws. People from this culture don't frequently change employers, but are not very enthusiastic about new roles, changes in job profiles and handling new responsibilities.

Sense of Masculinity / Femininity

Japan has a robust masculine culture where emotions like achievement, competition, material possession defines a masculine dominance and success. In contrast, the feminine cultures tend to value personal relationships and quality of life.

Scandinavian countries like Sweden have a strong focus on leading healthy lives, finding time for leisure, getting quality education, etc. People with such cultures are more interested in the overall standard of life and well-being and not just meeting bottom-lines.



Based on these responses, IBM designed four distinct work etiquette models for different cultures. People traveling from one place to another in higher designations were given cultural sensitivity training to understand the native culture of the people they were about to be working with.