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National VP for Junior Officers

"It is by no means enough that an officer of the Navy should be a capable mariner. He must be that, of course, but also a great deal more. He should be as well a gentleman of liberal education, refined manners, punctilious courtesy, and the nicest sense of personal honor." – John Paul Jones.

Social etiquette has changed considerably since the days of John Paul Jones. Today, in our fast-paced, mobile, informal 21st century society, many of the old customs have disappeared. However, certain esteemed traditions still survive. The following summary will treat some of the more common situations that we might come across. Bear in mind that as naval officers, we will be dealing with many people whom we do not know personally. At such times, social customs are practical. They help to improve life, to get things accomplished quickly, to smooth the course of friendly gatherings, and to eliminate friction in our daily contacts with each other.

COMMUNICATION – Correct, simple, and thoughtful speech, coupled with a capacity for intelligent conversation, constitutes one of the greatest assets that we can have. Conversation should be reciprocal, not monopolized. Engaging and intelligent conversation requires, among other things, a broad contact with literature and familiarity with current events. Time should be devoted to reading, studying, and cultivating an interest in national and international affairs. Although specialization seems to be the order of the day, we should also strive to maintain a broad point of view to keep the events of the day in perspective. Correct telephone speech is extremely important; poor telephone habits may often lead to misunderstandings. When placing a call,

Social Etiquette for the JO

one should identify oneself by name. When answering an office telephone, one should identify the office before stating one's name.

INVITATION – Answer promptly an invitation, in the form in which it is received, formally or informally, as the host or hostess must know immediately whether all invited guests are coming so that proper preparations can be made. Under no circumstances should one answer a dinner invitation conditionally or ask the host or hostess if one can reply later. One must give a definite acceptance or refusal at once. Once accepted, do not permit anything to prevent attendance except the most compelling emergency. Unmarried officers must never assume that an invitation includes a date of their own selection unless the invitation so indicates. The thoughtful guests will always write a note of appreciation.

PRECEDENCE – As a general rule, men are introduced to women. However, there are always exceptions to the rule. For example, women are introduced to the President of the United States, to royalty, and to ranking church dignitaries. In a military situation, junior women are introduced to senior men. In addition, introducing very young women to men who are of advanced years or who combine moderate age with rank or titles of considerable importance is usually proper and desirable. A single woman is introduced to a married woman unless there is a marked difference in their ages, in which case the younger is introduced to the older. In introducing two married women or two single women, if no other basis of precedence exists, it is courteous to introduce the one with whom one is better acquainted to the other. The same rule may be followed with propriety among officers of the same grade. Correct informal introductions always include first and last names of ladies. One should wait until the lady invites the use of her first name only. The simple rule is to introduce others to the person one wishes to honor.

HANDSHAKE – Men shake hands upon being introduced or saying goodbye with the senior making the first move. A man should wait until a woman offers her

hand before extending his. If he is seated, he should rise to his feet when being introduced to anyone, and upon departure of anyone. When women shake hands, a younger woman customarily waits for an older or higher-ranking woman to extend her hand in greeting first. The younger woman should rise when being introduced to the wife of a senior officer or a much older woman, and remain standing until that woman is seated. A woman needs not rise for an introduction to a contemporary, other than a military woman who is her senior.

POTPOURRI – The following are points of reference and handy items to know:

- * Exact protocol is usually observed in diplomatic circles and at higher level governmental affairs.

- * Dress for a change of command or retirement ceremony is usually service dress for observers. The dress of an officer's wife or date is a tailored dress or suit and gloves; hat is optional. The civilian husband of a woman officer wears a business suit. There is always a printed program informing guests when to sit and when to rise. When an admiral or high-ranking dignitary arrives aboard, civilian women do not stand; but during rendition of personal honors, "ruffles and flourishes," or gun salutes, women stand at attention as long as the service members are saluting.

- * Ship's ceremonies, such as christenings, commissioning, and changes of command, are always daytime affairs. Attendance of guests is by invitation only.

- * At formal dinners, married couples customarily are not seated together. The man is told which woman is to be seated to his right, seeks her out when dinner is announced, and escorts her to the table.

- * The majority of dinners given by Navy couples are informal buffets because they are adaptable to almost any size house, require a minimum of service, and may be prepared in advanced.

Certainly, all contingencies cannot be covered within the very limited scope of this article. For a more complete and detailed coverage of naval social etiquette, please refer to the **Social Usage & Protocol Handbook**, OPNAVINST 1710.7A. ⚓