



On Becoming A Lady

Growing up in today's world is an exciting thing. Although careers in science, engineering, business and even politics were limited or non-existent for the women in our families just a few generations back, the advancement of technology and progressive thinking have resulted in new opportunities for women in this country. While the traditional female roles of mother, housekeeper and teacher remain as vital to our quality of life as ever, it's also within your grasp to be a doctor, astronaut, microbiologist or president. It's all up to you.

Regardless of which path you choose, however, there are skills you must learn and use to achieve your goal. There are also what we call "soft" skills—the skills that are often not taught in schools—that each of us must have to succeed.

These skills help us stand out in a crowd and must be learned early in our lives. They help us in elementary, middle and high schools and, as we become adults, must always be with us. They all deal with showing respect to others and they're what make a woman a lady.

What do you think makes the difference between a woman and a lady? Perhaps there's a woman whom you admire greatly; what are the traits that set her apart from other women you have met?

The soft skills we're talking about fall into what we have many names for—manners, kindness—but they all fall under the general category of etiquette. And that's a fancy name for simply saying LADY.

A lady...knows how to make a positive first and lasting impression.

- She always knows how to talk with people, even those she doesn't know well.
- She is a conscientious worker and treats the company she works for as if it were her own.
- She can set a proper table and has excellent table manners.
- She always knows what to wear.
- She responds to invitations promptly and is a thoughtful guest.
- She never fails to say thank you and always writes thank you notes.
- She's a great host, always putting the comfort of her guests first.
- She treats friends and those she doesn't know equally well.
- She is never rude to another person, even if they deserve it.

- She always looks for something positive to say about others who are not present and keeps things she knows about others to herself (she maintains privacy and never gossips).
- She shows the same respect for herself that she shows others.
- She knows how much to tip and who it's appropriate to tip.
- Feel free to add your own ideas to this list!

A Lady Talks

When a lady meets another person, there are two things that happen:

- There's an introduction and
- She shakes hands, looking the other person in the eye and smiling.
 - She knows to say the name of the female, the eldest or the VIP in these introductions, to say their first and last names and to add one piece of information about that person so that they can start their own conversation.

A lady can always start and continue a conversation with individuals. In her mental toolbox, she always has five to ten questions she can ask anyone to get a conversation started, recognizing that people are often pleased to talk about themselves or those they love.

Topics a lady never discusses

Whether it's at the dinner table or another occasion, a lady never brings up topics that can lead to a disagreement or that can be awkward for others. Politics, religion, medical procedures, and gossip are among those topics. She keeps the conversation positive and pleasant. A lady never speaks badly of others, uses swear words or coarse language.

A Lady at the Table

A lady knows how to properly set a table for the foods that will be eaten. She also knows what each utensil is for and how it should be used.

A lady knows how to use her napkin, how to correctly eat each different food (or what to do if she doesn't) and what to do when she has finished eating.

- She breaks off bread one bite-sized piece at a time over her bread plate, butters that one piece and pops it into her mouth.
- She progresses through a meal using the outermost utensils first and working her way in.
- She sits up straight at the table, only leaning against the back of the chair if she must.

- She knows how to eat both in the American and Continental styles of eating.
- Even if she does not think she likes a food, she always takes at least one bite of everything she is served (unless she has an allergy to it).
- She cuts meat one piece at a time.
- If she drops her napkin or a utensil, she leaves it on the floor and asks for another.
- A lady always treats servers with respect and knows that a tip is appropriate regardless.
- She never embarrasses others by correcting their bad table manners or makes fun of their eating methods.

A Lady Dresses

A lady understands appropriate dress for any occasion. She recognizes that dressing well is not about wearing the latest styles, but wearing clothes that suit her body type, coloring and personality and that what she wears shows respect for those she is around.

- She knows that a few, well-made outfits in a classic style are more valuable than poorly-made, trendy fashions. A little black dress, pearls and conservative styling are basics that every woman should have in her wardrobe.
- A lady's skirts, blouses and other clothing are never too revealing. She understands that showing too much skin is never appropriate.
- She wears a minimum of jewelry.
- She recognizes that some people have allergies that react strongly to heavy (or any, in some cases) perfume. Her scent should be light.
- She knows that personal hygiene is crucial in presenting a positive image. Daily baths, use of deodorant, frequent shampoos and a professional haircut can present the lady in her best light. Proper skin care is extremely important and a lady always takes the right steps to protect her skin and scalp from the harmful effects of the sun's UVA and UVB rays. A lady always washes her hands after visiting the lady's room!
- She uses make-up artfully to enhance rather than to make a harsh statement.
- A lady's shoes should be chosen for comfort first, style second.

A Lady Attends

A lady enjoys an active social life because she's a wonderful guest. She knows when to respond to invitations, knows how to dress and how to mix and mingle with other guests and hosts. She is a thoughtful date and knows how to conduct herself at a wedding or funeral.

- When she sends out invitations, she is careful to include all needed information, including the reason for the party, times, date, address, and if a gift or how to respond regarding her attendance.

- She greets each guest at the door, welcoming him or her and makes sure that guest has everything he or she needs for the duration of the party.
- When a lady attends a party, she responds quickly to an invitation. If she is not sure if she can attend within a few days of the invitation's receipt, she lets the host/hostess know with a promise to accept or decline by a mutually acceptable time.
- She arrives on time, *never early*. If she must be late, she calls the host/hostess to advise when she expects to arrive. She never brings an unexpected guest unless it has been cleared with the host/hostess in advance.
- A lady offers assistance to her host or hostess but does not insist if her offer is declined.
- She brings a small gift for her host/hostess when she is invited to dinner parties, understanding that the gift is for the sole use of the host/hostess after the dinner party.
- She knows that once an invitation or a date has been accepted, she cannot back out should another, more pleasing, offer come her way. A commitment is a commitment that should be honored.

A Lady Says Thank You

A lady always seeks out the host/hostess of a party to thank him or her before she leaves the party. She also makes a point of thanking others who played a part in something special she has taken part in. She knows that saying "thank you" to members of her own family is just as important as thanking friends and others outside the home. And she should never forget people whom she sees on a daily basis.

Ladies not only know how to say thank you in person for a gift, they send thank you notes following any kindness they have been shown. If they do not have note cards pre printed with their names, they have standard blank note cards and stamps always available for a quick thank you note. They recognize that a thank you note should be sent within a few days (no more than a week) after a kindness is extended.

Kathie B. Martin

The Etiquette School of Birmingham

www.etiquetteschoolal.com

205-222-0932