

Thank you is in the dictionary; is it in your vocabulary?

Our summer house had a bathroom wall papered with New Yorker covers—which isn't to say that I'm saving all the thank you notes I've received over the last 10 years for that purpose. But I do tuck them away, away.

My favorites are from people you would least expect to have the time to pen a quip like "Good luck" or "Thanks for the great job!"

I'm talking about the big guys—the men at the top. In my experience, few women who reach those lofty positions take the time to jot a fast note of thanks.

Perhaps it's because women traditionally were responsible for secretarial duties associated with thank you etiquette and, after backbreaking efforts to reach their new positions, they put thank you notes right next to making coffee—too demeaning. Or perhaps they think because they are that high up, they shouldn't have time for anything but work.

Male or female, an essential key to the basic morals and manners of any corporate environment is business etiquette, and at the top of the list is the common thank you.

Everyone must take the time to express thanks for the contract, the dinner, the new job, the picture in the paper.

Why or how can a thank you be helpful to any business? First, it shows people that you have class. Next, it makes the other person feel appreciated, which in turn usually makes them want to do more business with your company.

If done with finesse, love is still better than never. I received a thank you from a bride a year after she was married. It was cute, and I was thrilled to hear that she still appreciated my work, even after all that time.

When should one say thank you, and how and to what degree? What about the client who keeps working with you year after year—always pays full price, never haggles, is quick and to the point, and pays the bills on time.

Do you ever sit down and hand-write a note to tell clients how much you personally appreciate their business, and thank them for their continuous support? Especially during these recessionary times, it is the best return-on-investment insurance.

Sometimes a token gift is appropriate. For instance, restaurants offer a drink on the house. My insurance agent and stockbroker give pens, soaps, card holders and disc books imprinted with their company name.

Sometimes an acknowledgment can turn into a thank you. Say a client makes the local news. You might want to clip the article and send it to the client with a note such as "See, I knew you were a great client, but now I see you are famous, too! Congratulations." Or "Just saw this article about you in the paper—great to have a guy like you on our team! And thanks again for your help with that hospital donation." (Don't ever write "Nice effort." Someone did that to me once and I felt like I had never quite made it—more like I still needed to try harder.)

If the article included a flattering picture of a terrific client, have the picture laminated. Say a dignitary gave a speech for your company and declined an honorarium. If a newspaper covered the event, wouldn't a laminated picture be a great way to say thank you while serving as a constant, positive reminder of your appreciative company? Everyone hangs plaques.

With the government cutting back, local needs must be met with increased charity. I am besieged daily with requests to meet



BUSINESS ETIQUETTE

Marilyn Mendell

these new goals. There are a few organizations that constantly neglect the thank you and behave as though they are doing you the favor of allowing you to contribute to their fund-raising event.

I'm not saying that people give to get, but charities cannot afford to take this stance in the current economic climate. Simply put, the group that says thank you is the group that gets more.

Sending a note when declining an invitation is another door for a thank you to walk in. "Thank you for inviting me (to your wedding, your open house, whatever), but we are unable to attend."

How many people do not realize the need to respond if they are not attending? RSVP means you must answer yes or no. And if you cannot attend after you have accepted the invitation, the caterer still charges the client. So be polite and at least call if you are unable to attend.

Nothing insults anger more than a "sniff." Everyone knows that high-ranking public officials rarely show up for every event, but they usually send a representative. Politicians understand the bad publicity associated with non-appearances.

Of course, anyone can get sick at the last

minute, but it is still advisable to call and say thank you for the original invitation.

There are other opportunities to express thanks. You always send a thank you on personal stationery after you have dinner at the boss' house, but on business stationery when a client takes you to lunch or dinner.

A bottle of wine is a pre-thank you when you go to dinner at a house. Flowers can be awkward. I have seen clients who have a pink and silver color scheme receive bright orange and yellow flowers in a basket and not know where to put them without offending the guest or ruining their plans.

I remember one customer who called to say thank you for the thank you that I had originally said thank you to first. I like her the best.

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