

COMPANY MANNERS

An Insider Tells
How to Succeed in the
Real World of
Corporate Protocol
& Power Politics

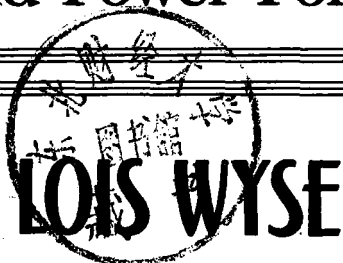
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Prologue



Let me begin at the beginning.

It all started a month or so ago when the executive vice president of a Fortune 500 company invited me to lunch in the company's corporate dining room four weeks hence. "It's time we did some things together," he said.

For four weeks I smiled a lot. Oh, what a chance this was. Me, the president of Wyse Advertising, one of the 100 largest advertising agencies in the United States, sought as a major client's luncheon guest.

Of course, I had been invited to corporate dining rooms before. I had even been invited to this corporation's dining room by persons higher on the ladder than the man who invited me. But my earlier visits to this company had been ceremonial, the kind of president-to-president visit that happens regularly in executive life. In our years in the advertising business, our agency has been involved with Fortune 500 companies, interesting entrepreneurial companies, and a collection of power people from New York to California, from Europe to Australia.

We have worked for the best of the beauty advertisers like Revlon and Clairol, for the giant conglomerate TRW and the giant American Express. We have been the advertising agency for companies as diverse as Maidenform and Seagram's. And we are the advertising agency that, more than twenty years ago, launched a campaign for a little jellymaker in Ohio with the line, "With a name like Smucker's it has to be good."

Still, despite our credits, an invitation to a nonclient's executive dining room was not an everyday occurrence. In my business you know you are wanted when the client comes after you. Usually it is the other way around.

I was excited by the possibilities of this new piece of business, and my enthusiasm was contagious. Everybody in the office shared my anticipatory high. Each day my associates and I regaled one another by imagining still more amazing opportunities we would be offered. It seemed that every sentence we uttered began with, "What if . . ." After all, could an executive vice president (forget for a minute that Fortune 500 companies have more executive vice presidents than we have secretaries)—could an executive vice president not be inviting me to lunch because he had an incredible assignment that would heap new riches on Wyse Advertising and make us eligible for still more kudos and Clios?

The night before the luncheon I laid out my clothes. No last minute stands at the closet for me. No, I'd be preprogrammed. Nothing like an uneven hem or a spot on a jacket would stop me.

I took out a little Adolfo. I figured if it's good enough for Nancy Reagan, it would work for me.

I took out the little Chanel bag and hat.

I put out the right pantyhose and the shoes.

I was up at 6 A.M., dressed, and in the office at 7:30 waiting for lunchtime.

And, at noon, like a shot, I ran up the street to my executive vice president and lunch in the executive suite.

There were two men at the luncheon, one executive vice pres-

ident, one divisional president. (In that dizzying world of corporate jungle gyms, there are many presidents who are lesser persons than the executive vice presidents. This was one of those instances.)

The men were charming—as are all men who are about to give you business—and we went through the ritual of the drink, the ordering, and the conversation. The conversation was incredible. It was crossed with promises and dotted with premises. If the company made this—how would we sell it? What did we think of the A strategy versus the B strategy? I was really getting into it now. I told them. I really told them. I gave them ideas I didn't even know I had. It was one of the greatest idea exchanges-cum-luncheons I had ever attended.

Then, at the end—you always know when the end of a luncheon is near because the host looks at his watch—at the end, the host said, "This has been fascinating, Lois. I just wish we had an assignment for you."

I choked. "Do you mean—do you actually mean—you have nothing for us?"

Large sigh from second man. "Too bad, isn't it?"

Me, turning purple. "Too bad? You think it's too bad. Then why am I here?"

Man One, "We wanted to get to know you better."

Me, "Why?"

Divisional president, "We like to know what talent is available in case we need it."

I stood up, straightened my Chanel and Adolfo parts, and said in my frostiest tone, hoping all the while that the sarcasm would not be lost on them, "Thank you."

And then I left.

And as I walked back to my office, I thought . . . those men are coarse and cruel. I don't care what clubs they belong to and how golden their parachutes may be.

How could they invite me, ostensibly for an assignment, let me think for ninety minutes that they planned to hire us, ask

me for ideas and innovative marketing perceptions, and then—
thunk!

How dare they!

What made them think that working for a big company was a reason to have little courtesy and concern for others.

These men—why these men had no manners.

And then I realized that, of course, they had manners.

They had company manners. They met life's exigencies with let-me-do-what's-best-for-me as the Number One Priority.

Company manners is the protocol by which one saves one's self in business.

In the corporation for which these men worked—in the corporate world *the corporation* means one significant executive at corporate level—well, one high-ranking executive liked the work of our company and wanted to see our agency hired.

And that scared these men.

Hire someone because a key executive on the forty-fourth floor thought it would be a good idea?

If they let us in, who knew what the corporation would ask next? More important, who knew what secrets we would take back to headquarters? Would they be second-guessed at every turn? Could we influence titles, spheres of influence, and salaries? And, if we did, who knew when their heads would be the next to roll?

No, their interpretation of company manners called for disposing of corporate wishes neatly. No blood on the rug; no bodies in the hallway. How could I complain when I had been wined and dined so politely? Wouldn't I sound like an emotional spoilsport if I were to complain?

Besides, what was there to complain about?

Hadn't the wine been chilled and the hosts warm?

It was nothing I could explain without whining. The hired assassins had done a very neat job in the corporate dining room.

And I had been hooked, snookered, and discarded.

Why hadn't I realized in advance what was about to happen?

What made me think that simply because so many corporate executives in my business life have treated me with courtesy and kindness that all would?

Why did I think people in business always meant what they said?

Because no one told me they didn't.

We simply don't tell each other about the booby traps, the secret words, the clubby attitudes that make up company manners. We slog along thinking everyone will learn for himself.

But I think it is high time that those of us who care about the way people treat one another in business recognize some company manners for the impious, time-wasting, money-wasting, career-busting maneuvers they often are.

I think it's about time someone told what goes on in the name of business, profits, and style.

So I have put together some of the things I have learned in working with some of the best-known corporate people in America.

I am recounting these stories because when you know what can happen, you can respond with appropriate action.

All company manners are not nefarious.

Nor are all companies and their operating executives.

But remember, nothing defangs a potential corporate tiger more swiftly than a person on the other side of the desk who understands what the Man with the Golden Parachute means—no matter what he says.

So welcome to Manners à la Business.

Every day another company is merged or submerged with another company. Every day senior people who thought they would go on doing whatever it is they were doing until nature stopped them now find that they are stopped by man.

These are the things no one wants to talk about—at least not out loud.

Company Manners is based on real experiences and real solutions. And, considering that much of our business life is disguised

as a social life and takes place outside of traditional business settings, this book talks about those times and places, too.

There are only two things people ask when they meet you, "What is your name?" followed by, "What do you do?" And very often they don't listen to your name until the second question is answered—and to their liking.

Business has become the central force in the lives of women as well as men. In the 1950s and 1960s men were identified by their jobs, and women were identified by their husband's work. Now each of us is known more as an individual and less as a spouse. From the business center of our lives we now create the pattern for behavior in other areas.

The way we do business is the way we live.

The waters are rough out there; survival is not enough, for there is no joy simply in surviving. Survival must be done with panache, with style, and that is what truly separates the top quality person, not just the top title, from the middle.

As for those two corporate executives who invited me to lunch in order to tell me that they had nothing for me, both have since learned that their corporation has nothing for them. What then becomes the fallback position for people with no company manners?

I have learned that style counts in the workplace.

I have learned that the style which I call company manners permits talent to flourish because the more we do to create a warm atmosphere, the better our talent grows.

This is the Age of Anxiety, the Century of Stress, the Era of Fear. If we develop a personal code of company manners in all parts of our lives, if we relieve the stress, we protect our greatest assets, our talents. In this way company manners becomes a kind of constant insurance policy for those things which we hold most dear.

I have learned that in business everyone is looking for someone to trust, and the secret to moving ahead is to gain the con-

fidence of one's superiors and one's peers. What better way than with exemplary company manners?

Exemplary company manners are made of more than caring for others. Caring is the beginning, but caring is not enough.

The way we communicate the caring is what it's about.

A generation ago we heard that the medium is the message.

Now the style is the manners.

Style is at the heart of company manners.

It is at the heart of the secrets I am about to tell.

PART
1

The Elements of Style

The style is the man himself.

George Louis, Comte de Buffon, 1753
