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The Fabulous Girl's Guide To Decorum

Kim Izzo And Ceri Marsh

*The Fabulous Girl's
Guide to*
DECORUM



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CORGI BOOKS

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*For the original Fabulous Girls,
Muriel Farrell and Margaret Northeast*

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Introduction

Manners will make you fabulous. Manners are sexy. The well-mannered get invited to more dinner parties and have a wider array of friends and colleagues who admire them. These are the basic tenets of *The Fabulous Girl's Guide to Decorum*.

The idea for this book came to us gradually over the course of one too many encounters with the socially inept, suffering through bad dinner parties and enduring thoughtless comments. Nearly once a week we would find ourselves on the phone or over tea, railing, 'They didn't even put food out until 11 p.m.! There was no music at all!' or 'She showed up to the cocktail party in jeans and a charity fun run T-shirt' or 'We ran into his ex and he didn't even introduce me'.

It began to add up. People are rude and inconsiderate to each other every day and in every circumstance, and what's worse, they don't seem to realize it. Perhaps they

just don't know any better. In addition to being vexed by the inadequacies of others, we were crippled by an inability to correct the offenders. As every well-mannered person knows, to correct someone else's breach in etiquette is itself an infraction.

Unless, it finally struck us, we were experts.

And after a lifetime of passionate interest in the subject and experience in a great many milieux, surely we had become experts in etiquette. Having lived as single girls, party girls, married women, out-of-workniks, professionals, world travellers and fashion addicts, we knew the world and, frankly, the way it ought to work.

The essential equation of etiquette is simple: be nice and assume niceness in others - just like your mother said. Beyond this basic belief, of course, there are specific details for situations, but the foundation is always the same.

Manners are an integral part of good citizenship. Consideration for others and not only for one's own wants and needs is necessary if a person is to be a valuable member of her world. When people of varying cultures and economic brackets must, increasingly, live side by side, etiquette becomes a modern requisite. Pleasant manners are just plain more appealing than bad manners. Behaving in a thoughtful way helps both morally and aesthetically to make the world a better place.

There is a kind of woman who understands this implicitly: we've named her the Fabulous Girl. You know the Fabulous Girl, don't you? She's Holly Golightly, the girl you must have at your cocktail party. She's smart, fun, stylish and, of course, beautifully well-mannered. She's the friend who always knows when you need a shoe-shopping expedition to lift your spirits. She's the one who calls you after your disastrous dinner party and insists that she had a

marvellous time. She's the girl you admire, the girl you want to be.

No-one is born perfect, and we all have a learning curve towards good manners. And so this book is both a celebration of the fully formed Fabulous Girl and a primer for the Fabulous Girl in training. The life of the modern woman is wonderfully full - work, friendship, romance and sex (we know they aren't always the same thing) are all vital to her happiness. In *The Fabulous Girl's Guide to Decorum* we will set down modern rules for every circumstance - from bedroom to boardroom - so that we're all armed with the appropriate arsenal of etiquette. Because you need to know how to handle a one-night stand just as much as you need to know how to set the table.

To illustrate this learning curve we've included the FG as fictional heroine throughout the book. Consider her as a guide to ease the journey to good manners.

Contrary to popular belief, manners will not make you a bore or a snob. Quite the opposite: individuals who possess skill with etiquette are admired and desired for it. If you are well mannered, people will want to come to your dinner parties and will want you at theirs. Manners can make you fabulous, girl - a Fabulous Girl.



The Workplace



'I was praying this morning that you wouldn't be wearing that skirt. And here you are,' sputtered Claire, a woman with a shape that women's magazines refer to euphemistically as 'pear', and my boss.

Now, I hate Monday mornings in general, but on this particular Monday, I had entirely forgotten about my job review. I was a receptionist at Corp Train, a management training firm that was as lame as it sounded.

I was silently horrified. Anyone can criticize my typing speed but never, never my style. Especially not Claire, who's idea of fashion was Annie Hall meets Laura from *Little House on the Prairie*. And to add insult to fashion injury, I was being critiqued by a person whose teeth were loaded with poppy seeds.

'We really believe in bringing people along here at Corp Train. We really do,' she continued, taking my silence as acknowledgement of sexy-skirt-guilt.

I had woken up feeling pretty good. Hair not too terrible. I wore my slightly see-through, long black skirt because it looked fabulous. As always, I wore it with completely opaque tights, so it was entirely respectable. Biking to work, I'd been thinking about how not so very bad

my job was. Nobody expected me to care about the corporate training sessions the company ran. Being a receptionist did not exactly tax a girl. And as soon as I figured out what I wanted to do with my life, I'd be able to put all my energy and free time into that thing...whatever it would be.

I mean, who cares about a review for a job you don't care about? Now it was sure to be my last day. This is how it went:

'It's just not appropriate for a corporate environment. At Corp Train we have to be seen as a team, and that team is professional and impeccably groomed.'

Was she also saying my hair was messy and I needed to use deodorant?

'So Step One, buy some more modest clothes. I know that's a quick fix, especially for someone like you.'

Like me? She didn't know me. I've only worked here three months and she'd said little to me other than hello and good night.

'There are two types of people in the world.'

'Really, only two types?' I asked and gripped the arms of my chair. Claire nodded emphatically and continued.

'Type A and Type B. Type As are stars. As soon as they walk into a room, you know it. Heads turn and they command an audience. Super-confident. Then there are Type-B personalities. These people are mild and shy and are often afraid to speak up and join in group dynamics. You are a Type B. Which is fine, but it means that you're not a natural leader. There is room for both types at Corp Train, so there is a place on the team for you too. It's just not a very mobile position, if you see what I mean.'

I don't know whether it was the B or the A in me that felt it was the right moment. For two things. 'I think next

Friday should be my last day. And, Claire, you've got all sorts of seeds in your teeth.'

Even though it hadn't been what I'd expected that sunny Monday and my bank balance meant that my actions should have sent me into terrible anxiety, all I really felt was relief and a perverse sense of power. And as I've learned over and over, nothing takes the edge off like a new pair of shoes and a bottle of Chianti with my two best friends, Eleanor and Missy.

In those days, Eleanor, Missy and I all despised Mondays, the launch pad of five days of Jill Jobs, those nowhere jobs we all begin with such as temping or waitressing. Over the weekend it was possible to start feeling a bit fab and self-determined. But back at a job you hate, the sheen of your weekend self-image quickly tarnishes. We'd been best friends since university, where we met in Intro. to Twentieth-Century Art. We bonded over the fact that we'd all come from small towns. Missy and El knew exactly how I'd felt growing up, dying to bust out of rural boredom. Although we were ambitious, stylish, smart girls, we had yet to get it together. I wanted to write, Eleanor wanted to art direct and Missy - well, she was just vaguely ambitious. Eleanor was a production assistant at *Kitchens* magazine and Missy waited tables at Dominic's, where after my Type A stand-off I too donned apron and corkscrew.

A month later I was not feeling quite so brave about my new life. What if Claire had been right? A Type-A person surely would have bounced right into a better job by now. Sure, I had started to phone editors looking for freelance work, but it took me an entire day to build up my nerve each time. Was I a B? Or had Claire just branded me as one?

I had moments of wanting the drones at Corp Train to pay for all the minor humiliations I'd endured under them

all those months. As I'd cycle through the city, dropping off CVs at restaurants and temp agencies, I started to compose a letter that would really blast them. I thought of sending it to Claire's boss. I'd outline all the inefficiencies that I'd been witness to as a receptionist. The thing about most execs is that they're so arrogant that they think the receptionist doesn't notice that they're using the FedEx account for personal use, that they're taking hour-and-a-half lunch breaks at least three times a week or that they've been doing it in the fax room with the new trainee when the boss thinks they're working late on that big account. And in particular, I'd outline Claire's utter incompetence as the office manager. I knew for a fact that she made all her personal long-distance phone calls from work.

I thrilled to the thought of Claire being brought down to size.

And then I had what I am sure was a very grown-up moment. I just thought better of it. I was on my way to leaving those kinds of jobs behind. Who cared what a bunch of suits thought of me? And let's face it, they wouldn't have thought much of my letter anyway. Claire's boss probably hired her in the first place.

Work

For no other generation has work been so central to a woman's sense of self. Work has, for many a woman, entirely replaced the identity she may have had in previous times. The work the Fabulous Girl does - or wants to do - is critical to her. While it is still unusual, it is not unheard of for a woman to forgo motherhood and be satisfied with a life that is defined solely by her career.

For several years of her adult life, an FG may work towards her ultimate career goals without pay. She may

take a less than challenging job just to pay the bills. The modern woman makes these sacrifices with long-term happiness in mind. Although it may cause her some anxiety, she is willing to give up traditional standards of security in the short run to have the life she's after in the end.

At the start of this particular career trajectory, it may be difficult for the outside world (and her family) to understand what the FG is doing or where she thinks she's going. Her life may seem a mishmash of waitressing jobs, volunteering, 'projects' (usually creative in character), courses, classes and travel. Indeed at times it will even seem to her as if it's all adding up to nothing. Somehow, by her late twenties or early thirties, an FG finds that it all has a way of coming together. All those experiences, along with her superior charm and grace, are suddenly exactly the right combination for the FG's dream job.

The Fabulous Girl acknowledges and thanks the women who have paved the way for her generation to enter the workforce. She appreciates that she now enjoys nearly endless career choices. But, an FG is not afraid to take advantage of her style and beauty and the benefits these attributes may reap for her in the course of her career. The FG notes the advantages in the workplace of being a young, confident, sexy woman. A self-assured woman carries her wit, charm and intellect with her wherever she goes. Men and women will treat her with respect because she demands it, not merely with words but with action. She knows she deserves the job, the rise, the success, the man and the flat. She's a Fabulous Girl.

Entering the Workforce

YOU ARE WHAT YOU WEAR

One of the keys to the Fabulous Girl's success is her sense of style. Of course she is intellectually or financially brilliant - or both - but what we're talking about here is what makes the FG succeed beyond other smart women. She knows how to dress, and while she may not be rich (yet), the FG simply loves clothes. She can put together a head-turning outfit from cheap chic shops and vintage finds. She knows how to apply make-up and never leaves her home without lipstick. She is always stylish and well groomed.

The Fabulous Girl reads fashion magazines from around the globe both for pleasure and to keep up with what's going on in the world of style. She window-shops on her lunch hour and before cocktails. While she is never afraid to try new looks, she knows what suits her body type and sticks to it. Why does any of this matter? Shouldn't this be dismissed as wanton vanity? Rubbish! The Fabulous Girl understands the importance of appearances and doesn't get in a knot about whether wearing lipstick makes her a bad 'sister'.

An FG knows that great style commands respect from employers and colleagues: it reads as self-respect. Employers are impressed when a staff member makes an effort with her appearance, as it demonstrates that she cares about the work she does and that she wants to be a good representative of her company. An FG appreciates that first impressions count, especially in the workplace. Stylishness is an enviable trait, and the Fabulous Girl relishes being envied, even copied.

The way you dress can definitely influence your success at work. When your boss is trying to decide between you and the smart but sloppy woman next to you for that management promotion, guess who gets the job? Dress for the job you wish was yours. Every workplace has a subtle dress code beyond the basic rules written up in your

employee's handbook. Take your cues from your boss's own sense of style (unless he or she is a slob). And please, no whining that it's not fair. Life is not fair - these are the tricks to winning the not-fair game.

WHO YOU KNOW

Nepotism is still the most unjust but effective way of landing a good job or freelance gig. Remember the film *Six Degrees of Separation*? When you are looking for work, there is something to be said for asking everyone you know, even your parents, who they know. Make sure, however, that it's a firm connection and not just someone your best friend's boyfriend met once at a barbecue last year. Those are more desperate measures. As an FG gets older, her friends will get into better positions and she will benefit all the more. The reverse is also true. A successful FG is also a confident one and therefore not afraid to help a friend develop her own career.

BRAINS: THERE FOR THE PICKING - YOURS INCLUDED

When you become successful enough, you will eventually get the call: 'Hi, my name is Felix. Fifi gave me your number. I'm dying to get into floral design, and I wondered if I could pick your brain sometime?' You will roll your eyes and look at your already packed schedule, but you should also be flattered, and you must oblige if at all possible. Everyone needs help at the start of a career - you did, didn't you? To balance universal karma, and to be polite, you must dispense whatever advice you can. How much time and mentoring you offer will depend on your schedule, of course, and on your assessment of the asker's potential. But remember: everyone deserves a chance. If you're the one requesting aid, there are very specific rules that must

be followed in order to graciously maximize your brain-picking:

1. You are asking for someone's time, their most valuable commodity, so make it sound like a request, not a demand.

2. Do your homework. Aim for two or three answers, addresses or names you'd like to get out of the conversation. Don't just chat; you can't ask for a brain-pick if what you really want is a new pal.

3. Keep it brief. (See 1.)

4. Pay the bar, café or restaurant tab. The generous pickee may offer to pay, particularly if they're financially successful and you're a struggling newcomer. You must refuse (so choose to meet someplace you can afford).

5. Remember all the favours you ask for now - and start storing up lore to share when your turn comes to be asked.

APPLY YOURSELF

As a newly minted college or school leaver, the Fabulous Girl needs to find herself a job. Depending on her level of education and her field of study, she will either enter at a junior level in her chosen profession or accept a Jill Job to tide her over until she finds her niche. In either case, an FG should never sell herself short. Peruse the ads in the local and national papers and check out the trade publications for your desired field. A girl can find a multitude of entry-level jobs that may satisfy her rent cheque and lead elsewhere. An FG should certainly also apply for jobs she's not quite qualified for. For example, if she's just getting started in her freelance writing career, she should still submit her CV for that associate editor job. Even if she doesn't get an interview, she will get her name out there.

Likewise, she should ask others to keep an ear open for interesting job opportunities.

An FG always updates her CV and keeps various drafts of it on her computer. She may at various times in her professional life need to adapt her CV for different jobs. For the dream job, an FG will pump up the volume of her related experiences in her coveted field. Everyone either lies or embellishes on their CV: an FG does it with style. Use different fonts for your contact information and name, embolden your headings, experiment with margins and spacing to build a strong one-sheet CV on yourself. Whatever is most exciting about your expertise should be placed first. For Jill Jobs, less is more. You do not want to appear too smart, accomplished or ambitious or an employer will sniff out that you'll be gone in six months and therefore pass you over. Dumb yourself down for these just-for-the-money jobs.

Cover letters are a must. Never fax or e-mail a CV without a cover letter. Always take the trouble to address it to a specific individual - never to 'Dear Sir or Madam' - and always state the job you're applying for and where you saw the ad; if you heard about it from a contact, state who that person is. At the close of the letter offer to submit references or samples of your work if requested. Never send scripts, showreels or audio cassettes unless invited to do so; it will only annoy the potential employer.

Some advertisements for jobs do not give out the company's name or phone number, so following up may be difficult. If you can follow up, wait one week; if you have not heard from the potential employer then call, fax or e-mail a brief note asking after the status of your application. Polite tenacity does pay off.

INTERVIEWS

The dreaded day of the interview has arrived. An FG is always impeccably groomed and chooses an appropriate ensemble for her moment of truth. Trouser or skirt suit - it does not matter which - but looking professional, even if the office is casual, is a must. When an FG arrives at the scene, she does so at least ten minutes early. This will not only ensure that she is perceived as punctual, it will also give her time to regroup. Ask the receptionist not to announce you immediately, but to direct you to the Ladies. An FG always wants a final look in the mirror to straighten her hair and the like before being introduced. She also wants to hang up her coat beforehand. The whole impression must be one of looking together and organized, not out of breath.

During the interview, be it one-on-one or with a panel of interrogators, always look your questioners right in the eyes. Keep your hands folded in your lap; never fidget. Smile as much as possible, except when offering serious answers. Have a couple of questions prepared for your interviewer. This shows that you have done your homework and that you are considering whether this is the job you want. Do not be afraid to be funny: humour is often a great tool for winning a person over. After all, who would you rather work with, the funny smart girl or the deadly serious smart girl?

Shake everyone's hand again as you leave. Follow up immediately with a note or e-mail to say thank you for the chance to meet with them. While an e-mail may suffice, a real note goes further. So break out the stationery if you really want the gig.

Again, if one week passes and you've heard nothing, a second follow-up is necessary. This may be a phone call to the person who interviewed you. You might also grill the receptionist on whether the job has been taken. If it's still open, leave a message or send an e-mail to the appropriate

person. Beyond three calls, however, you become an irritation.

Jill Jobs

There will, in all likelihood, be several years when the FG will be forced to toil at a job she loathes and doesn't lead anywhere - Jill Jobs. Waitressing, temping, reception - each a classic Jill Job - all are stops on the road to future fabulousness. An FG will always perform these duties with dignity, if not pride. You may feel like an idiot serving sandwiches to bankers in a boardroom, but doubtless they are very happy you are doing it. Smile and keep your seething to yourself.

There are upsides to this kind of employment: the hours are usually fixed and can be established in advance, these jobs are universally easy and no-one expects you to care that much about them (well, OK, your boss wishes you did, but let's get real). This last point is crucial. When you walk out the door of your reception job at 5.02 p.m., you can leave it behind. The FG will not wake up in the middle of the night thinking, 'Oh, my God! I filed the Masters folder *after* the Nicholsons!' Never.

The lack of emotional involvement means that the FG can easily be engaged in some other, more meaningful endeavour. Whether she spends her evenings (or mornings, as the case may be) working on a screenplay or studying Spanish, the FG is able to put her heart into the things she truly cares about during the Jill Job phase of her life.

Any Jill Job should be treated lightly. A Fabulous Girl always has a greater plan, and reminding herself of this can help ease the burden of her current drudgery. Do not take it seriously when you are harshly criticized for ordering the wrong type of toilet paper or coloured paper

clips. These things really don't matter and every FG knows it.

When you are meeting people there is nothing wrong in leaving until last, or even omitting altogether, the details of your Jill Job. If you meet a new person at a cocktail party, you can with a clear conscience say, 'I'm working on a proposal for Channel 4' and not add, 'That is, when I'm not clearing tables at the Le Club Très Cher'. The first statement refers to who you are; the second is just about your pay cheque.

Be Nice to the 'Little People'

Minions, Gophers, Lackeys and Other Entry-Level Jobs

RECEPTIONIST

Behold the pillar of corporate culture: the receptionist. She is tomorrow's Fabulous Girl. In fact, more often than not, the receptionist is already more fabulous than all those who hover about her desk and look down at her with scribbled messages she cannot read, letters that need to be typed or packages that absolutely must be overnighted even though it's already five o'clock.

Contrary to film noir notions of gum-cracking, nail-filing, supine femmes fatales, receptionists work hard. And these smart, ambitious, educated young women control everything. They determine which of the corporate drones they babysit get calls they need or their messages delivered, whose proposals and letters are typed accurately and promptly - all of those tedious chores that make business buzz.

Belittle her and your life can be made a living hell. You must smile, remember her name and use it regularly, enquire about her state of mind or health. Offer to get her a

coffee when you are getting one for yourself. Introduce her to clients when appropriate. Above all, she must be made to feel a part of the team. Remember: today's cute little thing behind the desk may be tomorrow's Fabulous Girl - and your boss.

If you find yourself in this very position, never allow an employer to raise his or her voice to you, call you names, insult you or touch you. The best course of action in these circumstances is a swift correction at the time of offence: 'Please, you do not need to yell at me' or 'Do not swear at me'. Forget such phrases as 'You hurt me when you do that'. That sort of emotional revelation is only for personal relationships. Be consistent. If you're getting nowhere with your reasonable demands for decent treatment, you may have to move on. After all, it's only a job.

COURIERS

Quite often these dishevelled boys (and increasingly girls) arrive looking like extras from *Easy Rider*. Their tough-guy demeanour intimidates many who find themselves trapped in lifts with them as they sweat and curse into their mobiles. But really they're just hard-working, hard-playing people who, in another life, work as musicians, writers and actors. It will not take too much time from your busy day to ask a bike courier how he is or simply to say hello. Remember, they risk life and limb (and often those of pedestrians and drivers) rushing about town to ensure that your diskette arrives within hours.

PERSONAL ASSISTANTS

Akin to owning a Porsche or sporting a Rolex, hiring a personal assistant is, for many, a status symbol, not a necessity. If you happen to be the Countess of Peoria and