

Giving Compliments and Making Apologies

By Jill Evans Kryston, Etiquette Consultant

Q: I'm a 27 year old who met an attractive, intelligent 33 year old school teacher at a public event. Over the next half hour we seemed to develop a great rapport. The conversation suddenly took a downhill turn after I tried to compliment her hourglass figure and liken her to a popular celebrity. I went into damage control mode, but my comments only exacerbated her anger. After she spoke her mind and walked away, she returned to WHAP me in the face! As I stood rubbing my cheek, I was trying to figure out why she was so upset. It seemed like a harmless comment, but maybe I don't understand women very well. Do you think I should send her an apology note since I have her email address?

A: I am impressed that you seem to be an honorable young man who is genuinely concerned about having made a wrong first impression. While you may have crossed the line with the "hourglass/celebrity" comment, the situation you described doesn't seem to warrant a slap in the face. It's possible that you may have taken the collective slap for other rude men whom this woman may have encountered.

I would agree that perhaps you don't know women as well as you should. Upon meeting for the first time, any comment about a woman's physical appearance may lead her to believe that you have the wrong thing on your mind.

A respectable woman would like to be known for her intelligence, her work, and her interests. Although you meant to pay a compliment, she obviously misinterpreted your intentions. A compliment is like giving a gift that doesn't cost you anything and it's normally accepted graciously. Try getting to know a woman better before you highlight her physical attributes with a compliment.

Everybody makes mistakes and does stupid things that are less than glowing. A gentleman, however, tries to make as few mistakes as possible and tries not to make the same mistake twice. When he does make a mistake, he freely admits to it and will promptly say, "I'm sorry."

I would advise you to apologize as soon as possible. Your apology may not rectify the situation to your liking, but it will go a long way to ease your conscience; you will be true to yourself knowing you've done the right thing.

In my own experience, one never knows what will transpire from a gentlemanly act. Many a relationship has begun on a first misstep! Best wishes.

Do you have an etiquette question you want Jill to answer in her monthly column? Email your question(s) to: information@DefiningManners.com or mail to: P.O. Box 1703, Shavertown, PA 18708.

Defining Manners: A School of Contemporary Protocol offers certified etiquette instruction for all ages. Private, group and school classes are available. For a schedule of classes or to organize a class in your area, visit: www.DefiningManners.com or call 570-696-3209 for more information.