

## Leaving Food on Your Plate

By Jill Evans Kryston, Etiquette Consultant

**Q: It seems that lately, when I attend a business meal, a number of folks, instead of eating everything on their plate, will leave behind a few bites of food. Is it a fad, coincidence or etiquette?**

A: Originally, I thought there would be a straight forward answer to your question. Upon researching, however, I discovered that the “clean plate debate” can be a very tricky issue.

Many of us were raised by parents who experienced the Great Depression, and, therefore, became members of the “clean plate club.” The notion of “waste not, want not” was instilled during mealtime at a very early age. Also, there was an ever-popular motivational tool used to remind youngsters how fortunate they were to have food to eat while other children were starving around the world.

With obesity on the rise in America, a new philosophy has replaced the old standard, and parents no longer force children to clean their plates. Dieters are encouraged to eat until they are satisfied but not stuffed. Still, there are many who believe overeating for politeness sake is wrong. Considering today’s restaurant portions, it’s easy to understand why food is often left behind.

In some European cultures, a clean plate indicates that you’re still hungry and are ready for a second serving. Leaving food behind can mean several things depending on local tradition: you didn’t care for the food, you are completely satisfied with your portion or you’re acting in a gracious manner to show that you haven’t “pigged out.” In China, clearing a plate is considered rude, yet in America, it can send a non-verbal message that your food was delicious and was much appreciated.

There is no hard-and-fast rule as to whether one should finish food or leave a little behind. When Emily Post undertook the enormous task of establishing behavioral guidelines all but ninety years ago, two things she believed to be most important were: etiquette should always be practical and considerate of others. Her code has not changed and is still relevant to our modern lives. When it comes to the clean plate debate, I would suggest you use your common sense. To purposely leave food on a plate would be considered wasteful. However, it seems perfectly acceptable and practical to leave food if, for some reason, you were unable to eat everything.

*Do you have an etiquette question you want Jill to answer in her monthly column? Visit: [www.DefiningManners.com](http://www.DefiningManners.com) and click “In the News” to submit your questions or mail to: P.O. Box 1703, Shavertown, PA 18708.*

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