

Off with Hats

By Jill Kryston, Etiquette Consultant

Q: It seems more and more, that fewer people remove their hats indoors. Is hat etiquette passé or am I just witnessing rude behavior?

A: You pose an interesting question. Today's generation seems to live outside the conventions of hat-wearing etiquette as though it was from a by-gone era. I'm not certain whether it's a matter of protocol ignorance, or if it's being done out of blatant disregard for others. Either way, it reflects poorly on them.

The gesture of "tipping" or removing a hat is believed to have originated in the Dark Ages. Knights would lift the visor on their helmet to show their face as a sign of respect. Throughout the following centuries the conventions of hat etiquette evolved into a military salute and finally, a civilized way for a man to show proper respect toward another person and dignity toward oneself.

Up until the 1940's, it was considered bad manners for a lady or gentleman to be outside without appropriate headgear. Styles began to change by the 1960's, and President Kennedy became the first U.S. President to be seen outdoors without a hat. Since then, the use of hats has dramatically declined among men. However, a man is still expected to demonstrate politeness by removing his hat as a sign of respect, patriotism, and reverence.

On the other hand, it is acceptable for a woman to wear a hat indoors if it adorns or coordinates with the outfit she is wearing. The only time this rule changes is when the woman is dressed in casual attire, such as jeans and pants, and wearing a men's style cap or hat. Under this circumstance, she would adhere to the same rules as a man.

Hats should always be removed indoors especially in a home, church, courtroom, theatre or restaurant. Exceptions to this rule include some public places such as travel terminals, post offices, entrance halls or corridors of office buildings, or hotels and elevators. It's considered disrespectful to leave a hat on for the National Anthem or a funeral procession. In such instances the hat is removed with the right hand and placed over the heart.

When in doubt, air on the practical side and remove your hat. After all, the primary reason to wear a hat is to protect one from the elements. Once the hat is off, most people place it in their left hand so their right hand is free to perform other courtesies such as shaking hands, holding doors or lending a helping hand.

For those who find removing a hat inconvenient, I would remind them that they are not only demonstrating a lack of self-respect, but causing offense and disrespect towards others. I say it's time to take hats off to good manners!

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 open enrollment 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.