

HO! HO!
OH, NO!



Faux pas amid the festivities: It's all in how you respond - Page 1E

What's the protocol?

BY NANCY CHURNIN

DALLAS - (KRT) - People may have good intentions, but they fall into social traps when they don't know what they don't know, says Joy Weaver, president of Plano, Texas-based Protocol Enterprises.

That's where etiquette comes in. It helps people be "socially savvy," she says.

Weaver started Protocol Enterprises in July 2000 after years of fielding etiquette questions at the real-estate company where she worked as vice president of corporate communications. She took a Letitia Baldrige business etiquette program and studied with Dorothea Johnson, president of the Protocol School of Washington. Now she conducts training programs for business, civic and nonprofit organizations and answers protocol questions on her Web site, www.protocolexpert.com.

Here are typical protocol questions she encounters and their answers:

Q: What do you do when you have been invited to a party, such as a caroling party, to celebrate a religious holiday different from yours and don't feel comfortable attending?

A: Sincerely thank the person for the invitation and graciously let him or her know that you would not feel comfortable attending. Your honesty should be appreciated.

Q: What should you do when you are hosting a small party and friends who were not invited find out about it?

A: If they have the nerve to ask you about the party, kindly let them know why they were not included. For example, "We had a small get-together and invited only a few guests. I hope you understand."

Q: If someone brings food or beverages to your party, are you expected to serve the items?

A: Absolutely not. The host and hostess determine the menu. If a guest brings food or beverages to a party, it should be as a host or hostess gift.

Q: Is there a way to politely tell a person not to give you a gift that he or she has given you each year because you can't use it? If you are allergic to chocolate, for example, or you don't drink alcohol?

A: I recommend putting yourself in the giver's position. You would not want to waste money on a gift that is not used. You could say, "I appreciate your thoughtfulness so much each year, but I thought you would want to know that I am allergic to chocolate."

Q: If you are invited to celebrate Christmas or Hanukkah or Kwanzaa

with friends, should you bring gifts for everyone in the family, even if you have never met them before?

A: Your host should let you know in advance whether there will be a gift exchange. Without question, take a host or hostess gift.

Q: Are you supposed to give a holiday gift to your boss?

A: It depends on company policy. If you do buy your boss a gift, make sure it is not personal or unusually expensive - either can make for an awkward situation.

Q: What about giving holiday gifts to people at the office?

A: Always check office policy. If you give gifts, give from the heart. Don't go in debt trying to buy everyone a gift.

Q: I make Christmas cookies each year for my co-workers, but one co-worker is Jewish and another is Muslim.

A: This is a gift from the heart and should be offered to everyone. Individuals can choose to decline.

Q: What do you do when you are at a party at someone's house and the house pet is bothering you or you are allergic to it?

A: It is the responsibility of the pet owner to make sure the pet does not attend the party. If a pet appears and you are allergic, it is your responsibility to simply say, "Your pet is adorable, but I have an allergic reaction to pets."