



**Beware of the  
Etiquette Police**

# 5 Things the Parking Attendant, Waiter & Security Guard Say About You

BY ERIC HINTON

You see a Porsha Butler every day of your working life. Or an Edison Salinas. Or a Terry, or a Samia. Sometimes you know their names, sometimes not. They are the people who staff your security desk, park your car and serve you your lunch. While you may not take much notice of them, they certainly notice you. And the reviews are not always favorable.

Butler, a 26-year-old security guard for an office building in Newark, N.J., provides a valuable service to the residents in her complex, but you'd hardly know that by the treatment she receives from some of the people she's paid to protect. Part of her job is to check identification of people coming into the building, particularly if she's never seen them before. Sometimes the security measure is appreciated. Sometimes it's not.

"I had one guy look at me like who was I to be asking him for I.D. Then he literally threw his wallet at me," Butler recalls. "I just looked at it ... and asked him is that really how he plans on showing me his identification. Then he snatched it and walked away."

Service employees such as Butler say this type of rude, sometimes abusive behavior by corporate workers—even highly paid executives—is common.

### THE GOLDEN RULE

One of the earliest lessons you're taught is to treat others the way you want to be treated. It's a notion of displaying common courtesy and respect that your mother ingrained in you before she sent you out the door for school. And it's unlikely she said to only treat "important" people with respect, or only be on your best behavior when you think someone is watching.

So do those rules go out the window once you leave company grounds? Not if you care about career advancement. What you do, how you behave, and how you treat others around you—particularly when you think no one is watching—says as much about you and your prospects for future success as anything on your résumé.

"You can't shut your manners off when you walk out the revolving door of your office building. It just doesn't work that way," says Lisa Taylor Richey, founder of the American Academy of Etiquette, whose clientele includes Deloitte and Ernst & Young (Nos. 19 and 43, respectively, on The 2007 DiversityInc Top 50 Companies for Diversity® list). "People often get into a situation where they're playing different roles. But everything that you do—from the way you dress, the way you walk into the room, the way you shake hands, even the way you treat someone sitting next to you on the train at night—that's all a part of your personal brand."

DiversityInc interviewed several service professionals in Newark, N.J., where our headquarters are located, to get their perspective on how otherwise thoughtful, respectful professionals behave when they step off of company grounds. Some requested we use first names only to protect their jobs. Here's what they are saying ... maybe about you:

1

### You Don't Say 'Good Morning' to Me

Butler, who's worked security on and off for the past several years, says that for the most part, she enjoys her job. But she comes across more than her share of professionals who are dismissive, condescending or just verbally abusive. Yet what often distresses her most is when people don't even take the time to acknowledge her presence.

"I'll say good morning to everyone that enters the building. Sometimes I'll get it back. But sometimes people look at me like I'm speaking a foreign language," Butler says. "If I'm the first person you're going to see when you come to work, does it really take that much effort to respond to a 'Good morning'?"

2

### You Bark Orders at Me

Samia, a waitress at a restaurant that caters primarily to an upscale, professional clientele, says she's often amazed at how some people misbehave when they think no one is paying attention.

"They'll start talking about people they don't like at the job. Cursing. Just acting up," she says. "I have this one woman who comes in here always dressed very nice, but once she starts drinking, she'll start cur-

sing like a sailor. You'd be surprised how phony some people can be."

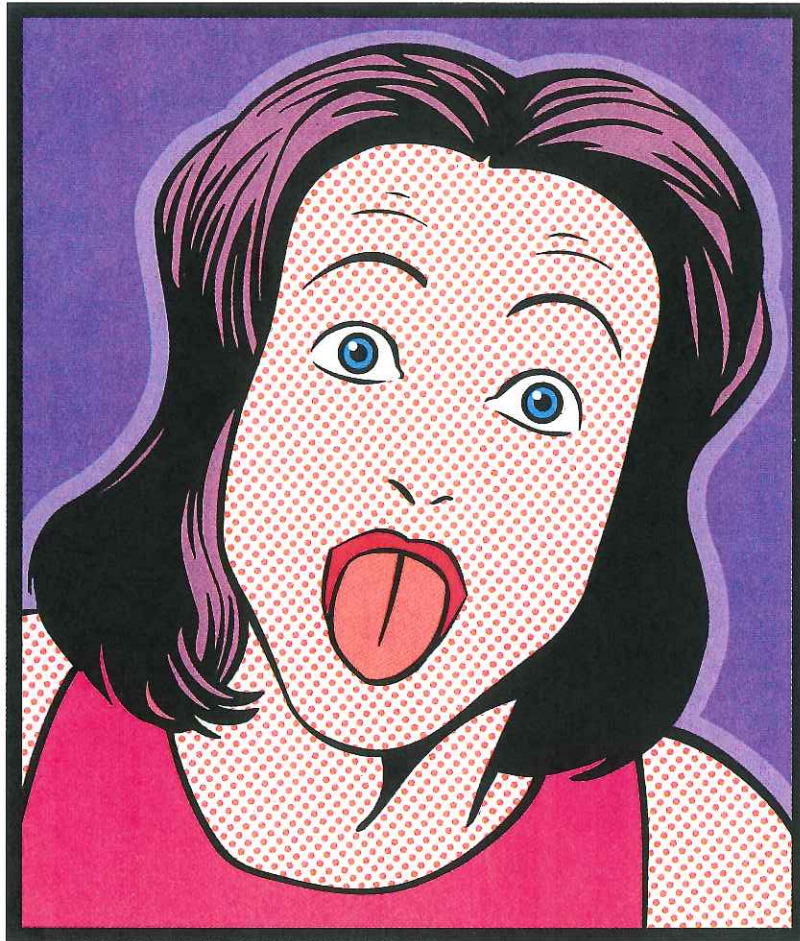
Sometimes patrons direct their boorish behavior at her, barking orders, snapping fingers and just showing poor manners. "There's always someone who will make demanding commands and try to talk down to you," she says. "It's funny how their behavior changes when they're in with someone else from work. It's like they take on a different persona."

### 3 You Won't Look Me in the Eye

John has delivered packages for DHL for the past 10 years. He says he receives much of the same treatment.

"You see it in the way some people talk to you, how they won't look you in the eye or how they snatch a scanner from your hand," he says. "Sometimes it's as simple as someone not saying a simple thank you. Sometimes I chalk it up to someone having a bad day and I let it go. It's not worth getting worked up over."

Richey believes those that do exhibit these tendencies do so at their own peril, both personally and professionally. "It's not about your company," she says. "It's about you. It should come from the inside. It's that confidence—that kindness that has to start from the inside first because it's important to you, not to 'Mr. Smith, my boss.' Whether it's shaking someone's hand or standing up when someone walks into a room ... There's nothing greater than walking into a room or standing up to give someone a handshake. You're doing that out of self-respect and you're doing it out of respect for the other person. It's a



two-way street. It has to be a part of who you are if you truly want to be successful."

### 4 You Won't Keep Your Hands to Yourself

Sometimes bad behavior extends beyond verbal abuse to the physical. Terry, a parking-lot attendant, is often entrusted to park the expensive automobiles of his patrons. Lexus, Mercedes, BMW—he's been behind the wheel of them all and treats each customer's car with the greatest care. But that hasn't stopped him from being pushed and shoved on occasion from irate customers in a

rush to leave the lot at the end of a long day.

"I've had people get frustrated and say things like, 'This is all you do. This is all you'll ever do. You'll work here until you die. You'll never make any money.' They are very rude ... nasty," he says. "Some of the ones in suits and ties come in their flashy cars and want to make you feel like a slave ... like you're only here to serve them."

Service workers like Terry are in precarious positions. If they respond in kind to the verbal attacks, they risk losing their jobs. For his part, Terry has learned to deal with his patrons on a case-by-case basis and says he never loses his cool.

"I don't want to do anything that's going to further provoke someone," he says. "They can only get so mad or be so rude if I keep my cool. I let them vent. You can only fight back with logic."

## 5 You Don't Show Me Basic Respect

Edison Salinas also works in a popular restaurant. He believes he's witnessed just about every type of behavior from his clients, on both sides of the spectrum. "I've been in this business for 14 years," Salinas says. "The only thing you're looking for is mutual respect."

Salinas says he's often treated better by blue-collar workers than white-collar workers. "It's funny that the blue-collar workers often show more respect than the white-collar types. My white-collar customer may come taking up two seats with the attitude 'I drive a Mercedes 2 class, so this is what I want and I want it right now.' They might start ordering things that aren't even on the menu because they're accustomed to owning their environment. But the blue-

"It really does come back to treating someone the way you want to be treated." Gary A. Smith, Ivy Planning Group

collar guy might come in dressed in jeans or a jumpsuit ... sees a bunch of guys dressed in suits and may be a little intimidated by the environment. So they're on their best behavior and manners are on full display," Salinas says. "Basic manners go a long way. What you want is to deal with someone that respects your profession. Don't treat me like a servant."


And if behaving well outside the office because it's the right thing

to do isn't enough motivation for you, then you may want to think about the consequences—especially because you never really know who's watching, listening or even videotaping, warns Gary A. Smith, senior partner and cofounder of the Ivy Planning Group, a management-consulting and training firm. Behavior you think is in the private sphere can quickly become public.

Smith believes technology is making it tougher to have what is commonly thought of as a private life. "[Nowadays,] when you start to interact with service professionals, whether it's a waiter in the restaurant or someone shining your shoes, there's a certain decorum about the way you must carry yourself in public unless you're prepared to be judged harshly," he says.

"You simply can't be these drastically different people anymore, primarily because senior executives now are public figures. You could be at your son's little-league game and start yelling at an umpire, and the next thing you know, you're on YouTube," says Smith. "You don't have the luxury of assuming you're in a safe

environment where you really can let your hair down. Your behavior anywhere represents your firm."

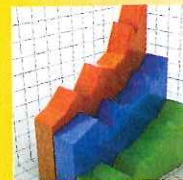
Regardless of the professional consequence, Smith says there's a more basic reason for treating others with common courtesy. "There should never be a situation where you are belittling people or looking down at someone because of their station," he says. "It really does come back to treating someone the way you want to be treated." 

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