

POISED FOR SUCCESS

MASTERING THE FOUR QUALITIES
THAT DISTINGUISH OUTSTANDING
PROFESSIONALS

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Business Class: Etiquette Essentials for Success at Work

CHAPTER I

Poise Is Presence Personified

**GIVE THE WORLD THE BEST YOU HAVE, AND
THE BEST WILL COME BACK TO YOU.**

— ELLA WHEELER WILCOX, AUTHOR AND POET

Whenever you have an unusual job, particularly if you're a circus clown, crematory operator, snake charmer, or etiquette expert, people make assumptions about your personality and background. In my case, I *am* an etiquette expert, and many people I meet today assume that I grew up enjoying a privileged lifestyle. But nothing could be further from the truth.

I was born the fourth of five children in the small town of Haines City, located in Central Florida. My mom, Elsie, left my abusive, alcoholic father (her third husband) when I was just five years old. Unable to support all of us on her own, Mom had to make the heartbreaking choice of sending my three older siblings to live with their father. My mother, my younger brother, and I moved in with my Granny Johnson until Mom could afford a down payment on a government-subsidized house she found in a quaint middle-class neighborhood adjacent to some orange groves.

Growing up, I didn't attend fancy tea parties, cotillions, or private schools. Life was more than modest; my clothes came from discount stores or I dressed in my cousin's hand-me-downs. The special activities many of my friends enjoyed, including dance classes, piano lessons, and summer vacations, were simply out of the question. I was raised Southern Baptist and spent most of my childhood in church, where I learned to sing and play handbells.

Because my dad was a World War II disabled veteran, I was fortunate to attend college thanks to the educational funding I received from the Veterans Benefits Administration. I majored in broadcasting at the University of Florida with the intent to become a TV reporter. But my career aspirations quickly fizzled when I took an internship with CNN in Washington, D.C. Unfortunately, I loathed every minute of it and realized that I wasn't cut out for the cutthroat radio and TV industry.

After graduation, I had no idea what I wanted to be when I grew up, so I explored a variety of unique and diverse occupations. I was a sales associate for ladies' clothes at an upscale department store, a singer, dancer, and actor at SeaWorld of Florida, an administrative assistant and special events coordinator at a Walt Disney World hotel, and a flight attendant with Northwest Airlines.

I found happiness in every job I had and I never imagined that life could get even better . . . until I landed my dream job in 1993. That's when I had the good fortune to be hired as the assistant director of public relations for one of the most luxurious and exclusive hotels in the world—The Breakers in Palm Beach, Florida. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the hotel has played host to generations of the rich and famous. My job at the prestigious and palatial Breakers Hotel was a portal into a

glamorous, glittery, and elegant world. It was also my finishing school. Who knew that one day this small-town girl would dine and dance at some of the most opulent charity galas in the world or rub elbows with people she read about in magazines and newspapers? As time went on, I eventually took part in The Breakers Annual Executive Camp and then went on to take a more extensive business etiquette certification course in Washington, D.C. As a result, I was named the hotel's first protocol officer, which afforded me the opportunity to mix and mingle with some of the world's most interesting and influential people who came to Palm Beach.

WHAT PRESENCE IS AND WHAT IT IS NOT

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines presence as “a noteworthy quality of poise and effectiveness.” Poise is all about balance—the way you hold yourself and how you move through the world. It's about paying attention to the details of you, which means accepting, embracing, and taking full advantage of all you have to work with. It's your desire to improve, without the fear of embarrassment or intimidation.

The Palm Beach lifestyle could have easily intimidated me, but my sheer desire to be a part of this exciting world helped me quell any hesitation or discomfort I felt. I learned to cultivate my presence and adapt and assimilate into my surroundings just as a chameleon blends in with its environment. I loved working at The Breakers, but like all good things, my tenure there eventually came to an end.

My mother often said, “A person's life can change in an instant with just one phone call or trip to the mailbox,” and she was

correct. On a hot, sticky afternoon in August 1998, I unsuspecting received a phone call that changed my life. My boss called me and in a curt voice he instructed me to report to his office immediately. When I hung up the phone, I broke out into a cold sweat—the kind you get right before someone tells you some really bad news. When I entered my boss’s office, my heart sank when I saw the director of human resources sitting next to him. My suspicions were immediately confirmed—my job position was about to be eliminated.

I sat there, numb and in shock. My husband and I had only been married two months; we had a mortgage, car payments, wedding bills, and other financial obligations. But rather than focus on the “failure” aspects of this experience, I decided to stay poised and face my adversity with grace. A month later, I decided to take the plunge and start my own business—The Protocol School of Palm Beach, a company that’s still going strong today.

Whenever you can stay centered and embrace your own poise during tough times, you tap into your most precious inner resources—insight, strength, and depth of character. Presence has its own power source. When you’re composed, sufficiently practiced, and self-assured, when you feel strong enough to move mental mountains, you are poised for success.

Most of the greatest achievers in the world, from entrepreneurs to athletes and artists, could not have achieved their levels of success without experiencing some adversity. For example, swimmer and Olympic gold medalist Michael Phelps has athletic poise and presence. He has the ability to develop and maintain a particular state of physical and psychological readiness, both of which he can summon on demand.

Whether you’re an athlete, astronaut, business owner, or employee, presence is a prerequisite to peak performance. Some

people consider presence an innate gift or inborn talent, such as the ability to carry a tune or draw a picture, but anyone can cultivate this quality. It's simply the ability to develop an internal sense of serenity or centeredness, a state of mind that brings enormous peace and inner strength. It's the ability to put yourself in a state of mind where calmness and power intertwine (think extreme self-confidence), allowing you to stand out, perform at your peak, and outshine the competition!

Presence isn't something you put on in the morning and take off in the evening; it's a part of your essence. Once it's internalized, it emanates from within, replacing self-doubt and anxiety with self-empowerment. Others are drawn to you because you exude a "humble" self-confidence and optimism. It's evident that you have something special to offer. In this book I explain how to achieve that "special something."

Professionals who possess presence are confident without arrogance, composed without stiffness, and kind without pretension, to friends and strangers alike. They are able to express their graciousness with everyone they meet, from corporate leaders to custodians.

When you cultivate your own presence you draw admiration from others. Not only will people want to develop friendships with you; they also will want to socialize with you, do business with you, and, in some instances, maybe even date and marry you. (Don't laugh . . . it happened to me.)