

BehindTheScene



Etiquette as a business tool

Etiquette is no longer an awareness of the social niceties, of which fork to use and what wine to offer. Good etiquette is now a skill, which when properly utilised in the corporate world translates into greater success. No wonder then that **Finishing Touch** the etiquette academy in Dubai has many beating a path to its door.

The word 'etiquette' meaning label or ticket, originated in France during the time of King Louis IV. His gardener at Versailles took umbrage at aristocrats trampling through his gardens and put up signs or 'etiquettes' to warn them to keep off the grass. The aristocrats ignored the signs, until the gardener brought the matter to the king's attention. King Louis IV then decreed that no one was to go beyond the bounds of the 'etiquette'. The word later evolved to include the ticket to court functions that listed the rules of where to stand and what to do.

Today, good etiquette would mean rules governing socially acceptable behaviour, but with the world turning into a giant global village, societal and cultural differences become a major barrier to smooth corporate functioning. Valuable time, even contracts are lost for lack of proper knowledge in social norms sacred to a disparate society. It makes sound business sense then, for corporates to give their team that indispensable polish. Many corporates employ professionals in etiquette to teach good manners to executives.

Where there is a need, an idea will bloom. Finishing

Touch, an academy dedicated to etiquette and protocol was established in Dubai last September. The first of its kind in the region Finishing Touch at Dubai Knowledge Village offers courses in corporate etiquette, social etiquette, youth etiquette, expatriate etiquette and that all-essential *savoir-vivre* or fine arts.

Worth the wait

Who would have thought that an invitation to a tasting event would trigger off a big idea? Nour Roumieh, the managing partner of Finishing Touch, and her partner, Nadia Azem were invited to a tasting event. They noticed that the people who attended the event were from disparate cultures and backgrounds and not able to really enjoy and understand a beautiful event. "It made us think," says Roumieh, "Why not create a kind of academy where we can help people learn about different lifestyles, different behaviours, an understanding of other cultures, respect of everyone's ideologies - and put them all together under one roof where people can come and learn and get trained. That's how the idea for Finishing Touch came about. It took us more than two years to make this a

reality."

The passion was there, but would it work? They started researching and discovered that this type of institute had already become a world trend. They learned that there were academies and individuals teaching etiquette generally and that there were many etiquette specialties. There was social etiquette, youth etiquette, business etiquette, hospitality etiquette and the idea took form. "We said, let's create something combining all these things and introduce a new idea," said Roumieh, "a new concept - not existing in the Middle East yet."

And Finishing Touch was born.

Train the trainers

Teachers can make or mar an institution. Prior to opening, Roumieh and her partner scoured the world and contacted sources in Europe, the US and Canada to choose the best. With these sources, the academy partnered to develop and build up the programmes. And chartered trainers to prepare the team on the methodology adopted by Finishing Touch that took considerable time.

"We sourced from Dubai," says Roumieh. "We met hundreds of people and chose our team based on skills, soft skills and know-how. The trainers' training took almost one year. They were trained in two levels by certified professionals. The first level was on the content of each of the subjects they would specialise in. The second level of training involved methodology; how to offer the courses in a standardised method that identifies our school. We trained them until we were confident that they could represent the school in the best possible way."

The methodology used in the training programmes, included interactive sessions, hands-on practical application and small workshops supported by visual aids such as slideshows and printouts. The content of the courses, says Roumieh is based on international, certified programmes, which have been adapted to the region.

The academy has the facilities to conduct the different programmes, which vary in length from four hours to one day or even longer, depending on the programme layout based on the client's needs. The number of participants is also limited to ensure that each one is given maximum attention, particularly during hands-on practical sessions.

"We prefer that the courses are conducted here unless there really is a need to have a different ambience. If a company wants us to train a large number of their employees, and they wouldn't want to be bothered about moving them to the academy; if they are able to give us a training room, then we can move the training to their premises," explains Roumieh.

Soft skills for success

Finishing Touch aims to promote good manners by teaching soft skills and an ability to deal with differences that build a strong rapport between individuals.



The academy offers courses in Corporate Etiquette, Social Etiquette, Expatriate Etiquette, Youth Etiquette, as well as Image Consultancy. Customised programmes are also offered, designed according to specific needs and objectives of the client, which can be conducted in private sessions. The academy also has a fine arts appreciation courses, *Art de Vivre* "The Finishing Touch," which is a series of classes that provide insights into floral art, history of art, the music appreciation, history of classical music, gemmology, the art of scents and perfumes.

"For example," says Roumieh, "the Gemmology course has a professional European trainer who works for an international laboratory, which specialises in certifying precious stones worldwide. They are based in Belgium and they have offices in New York, Tokyo and Dubai. For History of Art, we have a professor who has a PhD in Art. Soon we will be having a joint venture with a very prestigious international school for Floral Art."

Finishing Touch has trainers, for teaching in English, in French and in Arabic. Each trainer specialises in a course in etiquette, either Corporate, Social, Expatriate or Youth.

The Corporate Etiquette programme has modules on General Attitude where students are introduced to the meaning of etiquette and protocol in an academic setting, and gradually moves on to the corporate environment. Here, the trainer demonstrates the importance of having proper manners at work. General Attitude also discusses the importance of image.

Communication Skills, Table Manners (including lessons on how to use tableware, dealing with table codes, tips on how to eat difficult food, conversation, etc), Entertaining for Business, Gift Giving and Receiving, and Dealing with Customers are the other modules under Corporate Etiquette

Finishing School is looking forward to tying up with a professional international school, which specialises in the hospitality industry. The plan is to offer a wider range of courses within the field.

Telephone operators and receptionists, sales and marketing - people who are the front liners projecting the image of the company - would benefit much from the Corporate Etiquette as well as the hospitality programs.

"We see this opportunity," says Roumieh, "because now there are many new hotels opening. People need to be trained. They must be trained even if they are coming from different backgrounds in the same field, because they have to project the image of the hotel." H
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