

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

August 6, 2008, 3:06 pm

## Please, Thank You and Everything In Between

Manners can make for some tricky terrain in today's workplace especially under trying circumstances — the sluggish economy, rumors of layoffs, pink slips.

To get the skinny on whether a man should in fact open a door for a woman and whether women really are more polite than men in the workplace, Journal Women sat down with Susan Fitter, founder of Global Manners, LLC, to discuss etiquette and its implications for men and women in the workforce today.

Bottom line: Kindness and empathy rule.

\*\*\*

**WSJ:** You work with everyone from stay-at-home parents to CEOs of major corporations. What do manners tell you about different people?

**Ms. Fitter:** Really there are more commonalities than differences. The common denominator is being kind, tolerant and taking the other person's perspective.

**WSJ:** Is there still the caveat that it's worse for a female boss to act rudely than a male boss?

**Ms. Fitter:** There is still a point of sexism. It's considered less of an offense for men to be rude, especially in business. We have to understand that there are still people who have been raised to think that way. This new generation has a bunch of different inputs than my generation or even the one [before] me, where the gender roles were more defined and now they're — rightly so — ill-defined, but we have to be sensitive to the fact that not everyone has these ideas.

**WSJ:** Some women get angry when men open the door for them; others get angry when men don't open the door for them. Is it a lose-lose situation?

**Ms. Fitter:** In business, gender has no role. You need men to not feel like they need to pull out a woman's chair; everyone's treated on an equal playing field. Men really do have to treat women on an even playing field, where gender just doesn't matter in the same way sexual orientation, race, or religious preference should not matter. And that's part of how we move forward.



It's never too early to learn a little office etiquette. (Photo: Associated Press)

**WSJ:** What do you make of the stereotype of women being kinder than men in corporate culture?

**Ms. Fitter:** In the early days there was something called the "Queen Bee" effect: When women first started achieving power, they would sometimes discriminate against other women because they paid their dues and felt others should in the same way. But back then women overcompensated and they had to be a little tough. Now they realize women don't have to be like men and don't want to be, and it probably doesn't serve them as well.

**WSJ:** How do you see office etiquette today? How has it changed or stayed the same?

**Ms. Fitter:** The CEO sets the tone and that reverberates right on down. If you keep in mind the other person's perspective, you're more likely to do what's right and that's topical now for both males and females.

\*\*\*