



HOW TO BE THE HOST WITH THE MOST AND BE THE GUEST TO REQUEST

by Stephen Davisson

WHETHER A HOLIDAY SEASON OR AN INTIMATE DINNER PARTY, THESE TIPS SHOULD LEAVE NO MAN LACKING THE SKILLS TO PLAN THE PERFECT PARTY, AS WELL AS KNOW HOW TO BE THE PERFECT PARTY GUEST.

THE PERFECT HOST

From a group of friends getting together for drinks at your place, or a big social gathering where you want to impress, the key to planning the perfect party is plan in advance so you can decompress and enjoy the event. It is vital as host you set the atmosphere for soiree, so being busy and occupied around your guests is out of the question—plan ahead. To plan the perfect party environment, here are a few rules to follow:

HAVE A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Entertaining should bring a smile to your face, as well as your guests, so learning how to be a gracious host is the key to success. Guest need to feel welcome, no matter if they are coming over for a holiday party, birthday party, or home-cooked meal. No matter how shy or quiet someone is, it is your job to make them feel welcome and part of the event. Get out there and set the tone. Most importantly, on the day of the event, no matter what, be relaxed. Be ready and prepared a few minutes before your guest arrive so you can greet them and have drink. Nothing ruins the atmosphere of a party quicker than a preoccupied host who doesn't or won't come out of the kitchen.

CREATE A STRONG GUEST LIST

All parties must start with a guest list. It is appropriate to give two to three weeks for responses for a dinner party, and a minimum of two weeks for a birthday party, and up to three months for more formal affairs. For formal affairs like a wedding or a formal dance, it is traditional to send a mailed invitation, but for more informal events send an electronic invitation, or call your guests. It's vital to mix up your guests with people of all ages and types. Also try to think of people you would like to introduce or have network together. A general rule of thumb is to have an equal number of men to women, as well as keep it at an even number for a sit down dinner party.

MAKE MEMORABLE FOOD & DRINKS

After you've made your guest list, focus on the details of what you want to serve at your party. Make some effort to plan your menu to wow everyone with a unique dish, dessert or cocktail. The key is to serve your guest will like and remember, which means keep it as simple as possible. If you are preparing food and drinks yourself, be sure and stick to a dish or cocktail you know will turn out well. Do not try and embellish something you've never made before if you are not sure how it will turn out. Do serve appetizers, but not so much you will have guests getting too full for the meal. The usual rule is three appetizers per guest, and three cocktails per person, depending on your crowd. Just remember, if it's a dinner party, the focal point should be the food and wine, not cocktails. If you decided to do an informal buffet for your party, try to have everything prepared and ready to go once your first guest arrives.

CREATE A PARTY ATMOSPHERE

Once you've got the food and drink planned, decide where and what kind of atmosphere you want to create for your party. If host your party at home, be sure to use the nicest plates and serving platter you have at your disposal. For sit down dinner parties, arranging the seating is part of the fun. Many romances have begun by a clever host playing matchmaker at a dinner party. A nice touch for any dinner party is using place card, but for intimate gathering with friends, place cards are out of place.

CREATE A MUSIC PLAYLIST

If you are planning to organize a party and your plans do not include hiring a DeeJay, then you need to do some pre-party work to make sure that the music doesn't disappoint. A rocking party music playlist is what you are going to need. Now, you might have a playlist already in your iPod/iTunes/Windows Media Player. That's great, use that. However, if you don't have that, one of the following sites should work. In fact, everyone - whether or not they have a party music playlist in their collection already - should take a look at these sites. You never know what might make your guests jump and dance.

WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

The forgotten rule of party throwing: once your party begins, the list of things that could go wrong is never-ending. Be prepared for no-shows, unexpected arrivals, someone bringing an uninvited guest, or even guests showing up on the wrong day. Some guests may leave early or come very late. You could run out of cocktails, or something could go wrong in the kitchen. The key to surviving is letting it roll off your shoulders. Don't let someone else's poor manners or mistakes ruin your party. If it is forecasted to rain, be sure and have several umbrellas for your guests.

THE PERFECT GUEST

It's a fact of life, people can be annoying. You. Me. Everyone. We share the same traits of being loud, annoying, and demanding with numerous bad habits at times. This makes us all a less-than-perfect party guest. Recognizing this basic fact of human nature is the ingredient to becoming the kind of guest people invite to their parties, or better yet, invite back. To be the perfect guest, it is essential to remember these rules at any party:

DON'T OVERSTAY YOUR WELCOME

Arrive at the party a short time after the start. For large events that will last into late night, it's ok to arrive 30 min after the event begins. For dinner parties or any formal affair, it is essential to arrive at the suggested start time—no exceptions. If you are running late to a dinner party, call ahead.

LOVE YOUR HOST, BUT NOT TOO MUCH

Your host is more than delighted to see you, but this does not mean you need to be attached at hip during the entire party. Greet your host and get out there and mingle.

DON'T BE A SLOB

Don't treat your host like you would a maid and make them pick up after you. If you are attending a large event and there is cleaning staff, that is one story, but picking up after yourself is always appreciated and a sign of manners. There is also no need to take picking up after yourself to the other extreme - trying to do the dishes. If you are at a dinner party, it is always nice to offer to help, but if your host says no, let it be.

ALWAYS BRING A SMALL GIFT

Never come empty handed to a party. Always bring your host a small gift, from flowers, wine, a candle, or tickets to the ballgame or theatre. This is important even if they insist you just bring yourself. After you leave the party, always send a hand-written (not e-mail) thank you note. If you didn't bring a gift when you came, send one with the thank you card.

RECIPROCITY

Any good guest will always reciprocate by becoming a host in some fashion. This doesn't mean you need to host a party at your place, per se, but a return invitation in some form is usually much appreciated. Another way to look at it: your host enjoys your company. A return invitation is a nice way to keep the relationship going, if you are interested. If you are not interested, write a warm thank you note for the hospitality and leave it at that.