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Etiquette coach shows just the right manner

By [JEFF HOUCK](#) | The Tampa Tribune

You wouldn't know it from the pearls she wears or her soft, lilting North Carolina accent, but Patricia Rossi was a tomboy.

She remembers climbing trees as late as age 12. Until one day her father, Neil, ordered her to climb down.

"I shimmied down," she says. "I know I smelled to high heaven because I was in my play clothes."

Her mother, Miriam, had passed away two years earlier. Rossi's father thought Patricia needed feminine refinement that he could not provide.

"He got me out of the tree and took me to a finishing school," she says.

Rossi spent the next year at Joan Baker's School of Modeling and Finishing in King's Mountain, N.C., about an hour west of Charlotte. The lessons learned about hosting parties, proper correspondence and writing of thank you notes would shape the rest of her life.

"As a teen, I thought, 'I might get some mileage out of this,' " she says. "Knowing how to navigate all things social is everything in North Carolina."

Rossi now lives in Trinity and works as a protocol and etiquette coach. Her tips on how to use common-sense etiquette in uncommon situations will appear occasionally in the Tribune and TBO.com.

"We've got to take the stuffiness out of etiquette," she says. "I want to be the one who makes it cool. We need it now more than ever. They're tools and guidelines every one of us needs to navigate the world with ease and grace."

Good manners pay

She remembers the first time her newly polished manners paid off in a big way. She auditioned for a modeling job in her early 20s. It was a cattle call. Each girl seemed prettier than the next.

"I was the only person who shook everyone's hand," Rossi says. "The casting director told me that shaking hands was why I got the job."

The job, modeling for Sea-Doo water scooters, provided enough money for her to study in Italy for two summers.

The lesson: Manners pay.

Later, Rossi worked as a pharmaceutical representative, but started consulting on the side. Physicians who noticed her personal etiquette asked her to coach their staffers. She was thrilled to see her students' results as she taught them about posture, the importance of handshakes and honing interpersonal skills.

"I would see people change in front of me," she says. "They gained confidence immediately."

She went full-time into etiquette work five years ago.

Among her clients was a Major League Baseball team that called for help because players were text messaging during coaching sessions. She attended the meetings and saw the problem: an assistant coach was texting. That made the players think it was OK.

Recently, she trained young accountants for a company. The new hires were fresh out of college, had poor table manners and didn't understand that they shouldn't order gobs of food when the company invited them lunch.

"You're not there to eat," Rossi says. "You are there to build lasting relationships, to listen, learn, and get to know your client."

How to smoke cigars

For her first set of tips, Rossi chose the topic of cigar etiquette in a nod to Tampa's cigar history.

"Growing up in North Carolina, cigars were the way my dad always celebrated," she says.

Knowing stogie do's and don'ts will come in handy next weekend during the Ybor City Chamber of Commerce's fourth annual Aficionado Days. On Saturday, after a dozen neighborhood restaurants offer tapas dishes, there will be an after-party smoker at the Italian Club.

"I continually go back to The Golden Rule," Rossi says.

"When it comes to cigars, I think we always need to be mindful of other people before we think of ourselves. You must think about how it's going to affect folks around you. Even around cigarette smokers, you have to be mindful."

The goal, Rossi says, is to leave every person, every situation and business contact feeling better than they were before they met you.

"I truly know in my bones that kindness yields threefold," she says. "What you put out there, It boomerangs back to you at the speed of light."

Aficionado Days Tapas Trail & After Party

WHAT: A sampling of Ybor City's tapas, hors d'oeuvres and treats; participants are transported to more than a dozen eateries. Afterward, it's dancing, cigars, desserts and more at the Italian Club. (For other Aficionado events, visit www.ybor.org and click Chamber Information and then Calendar/Events)

WHEN: Tapas Trail is 4:30-7 p.m.; after-party is 6:30-10 p.m. Saturday

WHERE: Ybor City

HOW MUCH: \$35

INFORMATION: Call (813) 241-8838