

## Notes on Holiday Dining:

At this time of year I like to remember my uncle Louie and his never-ending stream of advice. Whether you asked for it or not Louie would let you know what he thought about everything from color TV (they'll never get it right) to sushi (why?). He offered the following instructions in a note which he left before he disappeared from his apartment in the Bronx, NY on Christmas Eve of '88. Louie had a way of upsetting people. I want to share it with you while you still have time to adjust your plans.

**"Always start the evening with the house rules. THIS IS MY HOUSE AND I MAKE THE RULES!**

Make sure that everyone present understands that you are in charge of everything. That means everything. No exceptions. If someone wants to make a toast, if someone wants to pass food to the left, if someone wants to change seats...anything. You are in charge of it.

I have found it helpful over the years to rent a "take a number machine" like at the bakery or deli and mount it to a wall in the room where you will be eating. Make sure to inform your guests that they will need a number if they are going to want anything out of the ordinary like bacon bits or shaved ginger or ice or butter. In larger gatherings it is a good idea to warn people to take several numbers before sitting. It could be quite some time before their number comes up.

If an elderly person is attending, offer to get a number for them, a low number if you are in their will. This will show that you are considerate but still very much in control.

Keep your conversation to a minimum. Talking is everyone else's job. Your job is being in charge. Try short, punchy phrases like..."I imagine so", "My dad suffered from that" and "You're Bob's kid, aren't you?" If people still don't get it, try staring at a spot just above their eyes as they are talking. In short order they will find an excuse to leave the table. Make sure they use a number.

No gifts! Don't let that gift thing get started on your watch. You know where it leads and you don't want to go there. If a guest arrives bearing a brightly wrapped package, be firm. Meet them at the door and adopt a wide stance saying, "I told you, no gifts. You may have a

glass of punch and then you must leave." I guarantee you they won't mess up again next year.

At exactly fifty-seven minutes after dinner began push back from the table and say, "That was great. Thanks for joining us. Let me know if you need help finding your coat." Then walk around the table with a black, 50-gallon trash bag and start shoveling the scraps and paper plates into it.

Finally, try to make sure that each and every guest leaves with a meaningful parting thought from you. I like to write them down in advance with the appropriate guest's name next to each phrase. People appreciate the personal touch like, "Bob, next time no kids, OK?"

That about covers it. If you find that it's difficult to remember all of my advice just think of the bullet points.

You're in charge.  
Take a number.  
Talk is cheap.  
No gifts.  
Time's up.  
See ya.

Happy Holidays!"

Best Regards,  
Louie