

Teaching the art of business etiquette

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DeWITT - If you've ever received a business invitation with the instructions to RSVP and not done so, you've committed an etiquette faux pas. That's according to Miesje (pronounced MEE-sha) Havens, the owner of The Refined School of Protocol and Etiquette.

The school is a sole proprietorship she operates from her home in DeWitt, although the workshops she provides are conducted at client sites. "I worked in the financial-services industry and the banking industry for 20 years. And I observed over time that people were lacking skills, including people who worked for me," says Havens.

Prior to opening her own business, Havens worked 16 years as a branch manager, quality advisor, regional support manager, and district executive for Buffalo-based HSBC Bank USA, N.A., and most recently, four years as a regional manager for Utica-based Partners Trust Bank, which has since been acquired by Buffalo-based M&T Bancorp (NYSE: MTB).

Havens' work in various managerial positions required her to know business etiquette - including knowing how to make a proper introduction, making eye contact, and dining skills. "As I moved along in my career, I found that in many organizations, it's not something they teach even though I think it's critical to your success," says Havens.

It was last summer when Havens conducted a class for her own employees. She received positive feedback and started exploring the possibility of teaching more extensively.

Havens then opened her business in January 2008 and may look to move the business into office space within three years, but there are no definite plans as of now.

Havens says her work in the banking industry helped her understand the steps necessary to start a business. Besides creating a business plan and receiving certification, she joined trade organizations, filed the proper paperwork, opened a business banking account, and designed her own brochures.

She is the sole employee and has no plans to hire anyone new this year. Havens may look to hire a part-time employee in 2009.

So far, she's worked with six business clients but wouldn't disclose their names. Havens wouldn't disclose any revenue projection for 2008. Havens' background is in sales and she believes her 20 years of relationship management skills will help build her client base. "If you have people that don't know how to handle themselves in professional situations, especially with clients there, it's a negative reflection on the company, and your people aren't representing your brand," she says.

The Refined School of Protocol and Etiquette provides seminars and workshops on topics that include proper business attire, proper introductions, business meal tactics, and the importance of first impressions.

Havens says her work, so far, has been well-received.

The Refined School of Protocol and Etiquette

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- Type of business: Etiquette school
- Year founded: 2008
- Employees: 1
- Company owner: Miesje Havens

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