

ETIQUETTE



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In this season of fun and festivities there will be invitations galore — from simple get-togethers to big bashes, which entail sending and receiving invitations. Over the decades, my husband and I have

SHALL TRY! IF I AM IN KOLKATA, THANK YOU!!

accumulated our fair share of beautiful and thoughtful invites and replies, but over the past couple of years, we have had some hilarious, eye-rolling, eyebrow-raising, and borderline annoying ones too. Yes, I'm sharing examples. No, not sharing names. So sit back, enjoy, and take it with a grain of salt. And maybe a dash of pepper too.

Think about the enormous effort hosts put in for any event. Invite lists, invite creatives, decor, food and beverages, WhatsApp group messages, emails, follow-up reminders, and most importantly, the love and care they put into inviting people to be a part of their happiness.

And all that love and enthusiasm is met with these replies: "Shall try", "Shall try my best", "Shall come if I'm in town", "Shall revert" (but never do), "I didn't get any message" (but message shows DELIVERED), "Oh! I didn't see". These cryptic and elliptical replies leave us confused and wondering if you will, in fact, show up, and confused as to how many seating areas there should be.

The polite but lost replies: Some reply with only a "thank you". Yes, we are so glad, and appreciate your courtesy and love for brevity (we like short, crisp replies too), but do we count you in or out? Some others with the namaste emoji: We are adopting namaste over handshakes too and love our Indian culture, but it really doesn't give us a clue about

You must be surprised at this title, but these are the frequent replies we get after sending an invite

whether they plan to visit or not!

Many reply to actually confirm or decline: These people, for sure, are our favourite. Even if they declined. Why? Because they at least have the manners to inform us. And usually these are the people who have the busiest, most packed, hectic schedules that include inter-continental travel. They are sure of their plans, sure of who they want to meet, and always reply warmly.

"Oh yes! Where? When?": These are the downright confused busy bee. A strange reply that we are met with when we call to remind guests closer to the event after having sent the invite. And even on the day of the event, there are those that ask you, yet again, "Where should I come, what time should I be there?" when the details are on their phone WhatsApp! "Sorry, shall miss the play": Erm, that's okay. It's amazing to see these bees get their wires crossed not just about days and dates, but the entire occasion itself.

The complete silence non-replies: This lot seems to love the song *When You Say Nothing At All*. There is no word of acknowledgement, and so, of course, no commitment to say "yes" or "no". We understand this rids them of their headache, but think of the poor hosts who are trying to

balance the invite equation with unknown variables. Please, just reply! We get that you love your privacy and we dared to reach out. If you are not interested, please say so.

It is always good to look at the mirror. The same people who do not bother to reply expect others to send the RSVP immediately against their invite.

DO AND DON'T OF INVITATIONS

How and when you send invites is an excellent way of showing people how much you value and appreciate them and their time. It's the little things that matter. These little drops in the ocean help us establish and nurture the relationships that weave together the social fabric of our lives. Let us take a look at some of the dos and don'ts of invitations.

WHEN YOU'RE THE HOST

SAVE THE DATE: This is no longer reserved for weddings. Especially important if you are planning a formal or a big event. A "save the date" allows people to prioritise your event if they wish to.

Send detailed invitations out at least two weeks in advance: everyone is busy juggling their schedules. So, if you really want people to attend, give them time. **INCLUDE AN RSVP SECTION:** Always add and highlight your request for an RSVP and include a number too.

SEND A REMINDER: Two to three days before the event, send a "gentle reminder".

RESPECT YOUR GUEST'S PRIVACY: It is really surprising and offensive how event managers call up senior, respected individuals on their personal mobile numbers to ask about their RSVP status, or even their address to deliver the invite! This is an absolute invasion of privacy and bad manners. The more senior they are, the more they value their personal approachability. Just because you have your invitee's number does not mean you will hand it over to all of your staff involved in planning the event. When someone asks for their number, you cannot share it without their permission. Either you should make the call yourself, or ask politely whether they are comfortable with your sharing their numbers.

WHEN YOU RECEIVE AN INVITATION

There is no room for "maybe": Hosts put in a lot of effort in planning an event — whether it's a dinner for six or a party for 60 or 600. Respect that by replying with a clearly understandable "yes" or "no".

If the invitation is for cocktails and dinner, it is always better to let the host know if you will attend only cocktails, or stay back for dinner. If you are already committed to be somewhere else, the host will be happy that you were frank and honest and saved the extra counts. Not replying in advance and skipping silently is not appreciated. Accept with actual enthusiasm. Share how much you are looking forward to the event and extend congratulations if it is a special occasion. Always add a compliment too about the design of the invite.

Some of my husband's favourite responses when someone calls to invite are: "We are really excited!", "We are going shopping for the party", and "You need not call me for this". Decline with real regret. If you are unable to attend, say that with warmth too. Express how it is your loss that you are unable to attend, how much you will miss not being there. Be discreet. If you are in a group outing with the host and other people, do not mention the invitation.

COMPASSIONATE COMMUNICATION

One point to note — you never know if someone is suffering from depression, social anxiety, or some personal grief or illness that you know nothing about. They may not reply at all or send something noncommittal. If you get such a reply from a person who usually responds immediately and with enthusiasm, do take a moment to check in on them. Compassionate communication is of the utmost importance. It's very easy to judge, to jump to conclusions.

WHEN YOU ARE ATTENDING A LARGE EVENT

Discuss the event on the way, like who is the host, hostess, bride, groom, special occasion, invitees with whom you would like to meet, etc. so that when you meet them you can talk about something specific. Make it a point to meet the host or hostess so that they feel appreciated. If the host is talking to someone, wait for your turn.

So, what did you think? Have you ever been at the receiving end of such funny and not-so-funny replies? Share with me on askminubudhia@aringminds.co.in.

Picture: istock

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