

## Try not to be tardy with those RSVPs

by Anna Post

(Reuters) - A few days ago I attended my aunt's 50th birthday party. It was a terrific bash—her friends and family were there in suits and cocktail dresses for a night of dinner and dancing. My uncle went all-out on the evening, and had mailed invitations well over a month in advance, giving until the week before the party to reply.

Confession of an all-too-human etiquette expert: He got my reply on the day it was due—and only after my mom thankfully dropped me a reminder. I had found myself in a position that many well-intentioned people do: They know whether or not they can attend, and think—"Great! I'll let the host know."

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What they fail to do is go immediately to the phone or computer (or in the case of a wedding, the mailbox) and do so. Maybe they can't at that moment, and then forget.

Maybe they need to check with a spouse first, or arrange for childcare. My point is that many of us are well intentioned, and yet our intentions don't count for much when we don't follow through.

This is why failure to respond to invitations is so annoying to so many. Without our follow through, there is no way for the host to intuit our answer, and all the while they need to know their final numbers for planning purposes.

And this is to say nothing of the hurt many hosts feel when they go to the effort of arranging an event only to be met with silence.

Failure to RSVP (French for *répondez s'il vous plaît*, or "please reply") is one of the biggest etiquette complaints I hear about, and the one that is often accompanied by the most

frustration.

Whether the event is a children's birthday party or a wedding, hosts are often left to hound guests for an answer or else assume that the guest in question won't be coming.

In fact, most wedding invitations today reflect a recent change in etiquette that was made to encourage replies.

It used to be that a guest would use his or her own personal stationery to pen a very formal, third person reply to a wedding invitation: "Ms. Anna Post accepts with pleasure your kind invitation..."

But as failure to reply grew several decades ago, hosts decided to make responding foolproof by including a small reply card with its own stamped and addressed envelope.

Rather like notes that grade school children pass to one another, these reply cards have a simple line for the guest's name and box to check "will attend with pleasure" or "declines with regret."

How easy is that?

And yet I still hear from many brides that they need to chase down errant guests. It's not the method of reply that matters; it's us.

So I present you with this challenge: follow through.

Start with invitations.

If you need help remembering to reply, set a reminder on your phone, put a sticky note on your mirror, or keep the invitation in a prominent place where you won't forget or lose it.

If you need to check your calendar first, reply to email or text invitations immediately with a messaging saying just that—and add a "Thanks for thinking of me/us!" for good measure.

The world did not come close to ending because I gave my reply to my uncle the day it was due. But I did run the risk of suggesting that I didn't think much of the effort he was making, or worse, that I was holding out for a better offer.

While that was far from my intention, the whole point of etiquette is to help us build and maintain good relationships with others.

RSVPs encapsulate this idea: we can lag behind, we can come in on par, or we can go above and beyond. Think of this one task—RSVPing to invitations before they are due—as the gateway to other opportunities to show our respect and appreciation for others.

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