George Stroumboulopoulos
In the Den of the Good Wolf

Plus
Seasonal Recipes, Tips for a Relaxed Travel Experience and Party Etiquette 101
The holidays are right around the corner and the party invitations have piled up like the snowbanks left by snowplows at the end of your driveway. You're excited, but nervous. Especially after you had a few too many at last year's neighbourhood soiree and turned Pam and Mitch's coffee table into the stage of an impromptu rock concert.

To help you rebound, we've connected with etiquette and protocol consultant Leanne Pepper, general manager of the Faculty Club at the University of Toronto, to sort out the dos and don'ts for holiday get-togethers so you can become the ideal guest of this year's party circuit.

**BRING A GIFT**
If someone opens his or her home to you for an evening, don't show up empty-handed. Flowers will score brownie points, but bouquets mean the host is hunting down a vase, trimming the stems and distracted from what's already a hectic evening. Consider a potted plant — it's easier to manage and just as beautiful. Wine is also a standard go-to, but be sure to bring something else to go with it, such as identifier rings for glasses, cocktail napkins or candles. As Pepper explains, “It just shows your appreciation.”

**SHOW UP LATE … OR EARLY**
You may get some leeway if it’s just cocktails and finger foods, but there's nothing fashionable about strolling in an hour late if there's a six-course dinner on the docket. If the party starts at 7 be there 10 or 15 minutes after 7. But definitely do not arrive early. “Usually it's at that last minute that the host is lighting the candles, dimming the lights, setting the music — all the last-minute details,” says Pepper. “So arrive a few minutes after.”

**MINGLE AND SOCIALIZE**
No one likes the person whose face is glued to his or her iPhone the whole evening. “Connect with people. Mingle. Socialize,” says Pepper. Parties are a great way to network, and a warm smile and a firm handshake can be the best icebreakers. Make sure you're up-to-date on current affairs so you can be an active player in conversations, but always avoid the party convo taboos: politics and religion. The Fords, for example: “Don't go there.”

**DON'T BRING UNWANTED GUESTS**
Don't assume that bringing a friend or two isn't a big deal. Your
hosts may have something specific cooked up — a set dinner, perhaps — and unexpected mouths can throw off the whole evening. As a host, you might want to stipulate on invitations whether or not bringing a plus one is fine, but as a guest it’s always imperative to ask. And, Pepper adds, “Don’t assume it’s OK to take your kids. If you notice the time — that it’s starting at 8 p.m. — obviously it’s not a children’s party.”

Mention Dietary Needs Prior to the Evening
While it’s polite for hosts to ask guests in advance if they have any dietary restrictions (allergies or otherwise), sometimes that isn’t at the forefront of their minds. Let your host know beforehand if you can’t eat a certain kind of meat or if you’ll swell up like a balloon at the mere mention of shellfish. To be more accommodating, offer to bring a dish and “don’t just bring a portion for yourself.” Whip up a platter that you can share with the group. “I’m sure the host would be ever so grateful for that.”

Don’t Overstay Your Welcome
“You don’t want to camp over,” says Pepper, and there are obvious signals that it’s time to hit the road. If others are grabbing their coats and heading to the door it’s best to start thinking the same. Or if the host has been cleaning for the last hour, yawning excessively and giving those “Why are you still here?” looks, it’s time to ask yourself, “Yeah, why am I still here?”

Do Send a Thank-You Card
It’s so easy to email your gratitude after an enjoyable evening, so there’s no real excuse not to. But if you really want to leave a lasting impression, write a note. “A personal, handwritten thank-you card is just so nice,” says Pepper. People rarely do it anymore and it shows how much you really appreciated the pomegranate bellinis and bacon rollups.

Don’t Be the “Drunk” on Facebook
This should go without saying, but when it comes to booze: pace yourself. As Pepper explains, “You don’t want to be that person at the end of the night with the lampshade on the head,” and as such, the person in that photo online with the lampshade on his or her head. So go easy on the cocktails and be respectful. Besides, you don’t want to have to buy Pam and Mitch another coffee table.

Are you ready to live your dream retirement?

Lynn and James Harwood are recent retirees who are about to enjoy their first winter as official snowbirds. They will be spending four glorious months golfing, gathering seashells on the beach, and welcoming family and friends to their vacation home in Florida. Being away for that length of time requires planning and preparation. Fortunately, the Harwoods have chosen MK Total Wealth Management Group as their financial partner, which allows them the flexibility to leave for the winter without any strings attached. The team understands James and Lynn’s ongoing financial needs and investment goals, and has worked with them to create a complete wealth strategy. The TD Privately Managed Portfolios for example, are tailored to meet each client’s specific investment objectives.

The MK team has also introduced colleagues from TD’s Private Banking and Estate & Trust groups. The couple is reassured knowing that if needed, they have access to a TD Private Banker in the U.S. who understands their financial picture. This well-thought-out estate plan brings them additional peace of mind as they move into their next exciting chapter.

It’s your life and your future. Realize your full potential! Call us today.