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Reservations

Back in the late sixties and seventies I was a member of the Southern Methodist University Woman's Club, an organization active in campus and city life. When I became program chairman, I little realized that I was about to receive an extensive and long-lasting education in the mysteries of dealing with people. One of my first assignments was to arrange a spring luncheon for members and guests in the Student Center. Gerald Ramsey, director of food service for the University, had an enviable city-wide reputation as a gourmet chef for the variety and quality of the food he presented, a surprising evaluation given that his rule was that student organizations had first call on the food service, then University-connected organizations like ours, and last organizations and individuals from town. Indeed, his popularity was such that reservations for a luncheon in April were best made the year before. Gerald managed to squeeze in a date for our Spring Luncheon in the Grand Ballroom of the Student Center. I included the date for the luncheon in the Yearbook as well as in the fall Newsletter to the members. Then in the March issue of the Newsletter I listed the menu and set a deadline for the making of reservations. Reservations began coming in, but on the deadline the number of reservations was seriously below the number we expected. I was in a panic until Gerald told me he didn't need the final numbers until the day before the luncheon and even then he habitually prepared for five per cent additional guests.

I updated the number of reservations the day before the luncheon and checked with my subcommittees about table decorations. On the morning of the luncheon the number of reservations was two hundred twenty-five, a respectable number. My committees and I arrived early to take care of last-minute details. There were several, including eight new requests for reservations. Two more people came in just as the first course was being removed from the tables. Actually, four people who had not made reservations did not appear, so the numbers balanced out satisfactorily. I remember feeling very anxious about making our "quota" or of finding a place setting for everyone who came, on this my first official club experience with public nonchalance about reservations.

In an additional ten years of experience in the Woman's Club before we moved to Richmond, I kept trying to discover some way to persuade people to make their reservations in a timely fashion, no matter what my official club duties were. We began requiring prepaid reservations with no refunds. Sometimes the numbers improved, but not much.

When I became involved with the Virginia Commonwealth University Women's Club, I began another futile series of attempts to improve reservation responses, with the same poor results. At the same time, Paul and I began to have large receptions every fall for new faculty. The response was somewhat better from new faculty who were dealing with their dean, but it still wasn't perfect. Of course, the number of people attending an open house reception isn't as critical as the number for a luncheon. For the open house receptions, we found that few people came without acknowledgements, but a number frequently failed to come at all. In the seventies, we often wondered whether this

"relaxed" attitude toward social obligations was a function of the chaos of the sixties. Who knows? We did once or twice have a guest appear at our door the week before the party, and once the week after!

I've thought a lot about that situation which, I think – I hope - is not necessarily confined to large faculty affairs. It's not so general with small social affairs, but, to my shame, Paul and I failed - just plain forgot - to attend a small dinner party recently. That event has made me much more conscientious about keeping my calendar up to date and READING it daily. It's also made me much more tolerant of the social failing of others. I do, however, feel a certain empathy with social nonconformists of the not-attending type. Often, I've accepted an invitation with some enthusiasm only to see that enthusiasm wane as the date nears. To my credit, I've discovered that, if I attend in spite of my last-minute reluctance, I almost always have a good time. One occasion I cannot understand, however, is a club meeting scheduled at our house a couple of years ago when *no one* came.