



Good etiquette to avoid scents

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G8 Jay Remer

Entering old houses sometimes reminds me of visiting favourite relatives in my younger days. It's welcoming to walk into a home greeted by the wonderful aroma of freshly baked bread or simmering chicken soup.

The perfume section of a department store, a candy shop, flower shop and fast food restaurant each have distinctive smells that conjure up memories.

From childhood I recall the distinct stench of the fish market, the peanut factory and the strong perfume of a school teacher.

Many of us are so busy in our daily lives that we blithely go through the day unaware of the additional space we take that is occupied by scents.

It's important to remember that many people have aversions to specific odours and some have severe allergies.

Thankfully more and more people are becoming aware of just how offensive and dangerous scents are. Most human resources departments of companies have policies of a 'no scent' office space.

Most of us would not leave the house to go to work or visit friends without bathing and putting on clean clothes. We do that habitually for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is not to offend those around us. What makes people think that strong scents, sometimes purchased at great expense, do not offend others?

Some people carry pleasantly scented hankies with them at all times just in case they encounter an upsetting odour.

The best scent today is no scent at all. To avoid the need to use chemically laden air fresheners, perfumed cleaners or laundry products, simply clean your house with fragrance-free products. Keeping Rover and his bedding clean also contribute to an odour-free environment. Research has shown that the perfumes in the products we use are potentially harmful.

Personal hygiene products such as deodorants now come in the perfume-free variety. Unscented, however, is not a guarantee that the product is without a scent of some sort.

If you feel obliged to apply cologne or a spritz of perfume before going out on the town for the evening, do so with restraint.

What does one do if caught in the uncomfortable position of being around someone who is too heavily scented? From a practical point of view, move away. Do so as quietly as possible and, if pursued, honesty must prevail, and with as much grace as possible.

In a place such as a theatre with assigned seating, there are few choices. Complaining to the culprit will not solve the problem, although you may wish to say something such as, "Are you aware that your perfume is overwhelming?" Such a comment is truthful and indicates that perhaps the person should think more carefully next time. You can also request another seat from management and lodge a complaint, perhaps suggesting signage or a policy change. Common sense will dictate the solution. Just be sure not to be offensive in your reaction.

If this is in a workplace, you can ask the person to refrain from wearing the scent. Hopefully a straightforward discussion will end the problem.

If a family member or close friend is guilty, draw them aside privately and make them aware of the problem. Many people do not realize how strong the scent is as they are quite used to it. It is not the intention to deliberately offend others.

Following a cardinal etiquette guideline of being respectful of and not offending the people with whom we come in contact easily correlates with being mindful of the perfumes and scents we choose to wear. When in doubt, go without.

Jay Remer is certified by the Protocol School of Washington as a consultant for corporate etiquette and international protocol. He lives in St. Andrews. Email your etiquette questions to jay@etiquetteguy.com and visit his website at www.etiquetteguy.com.