



No do-overs on party RSVPs

Adapted from a recent online discussion:

Dear Carolyn: Give me permission to breach etiquette! Are there ANY circumstances under which I can take back my invitation acceptance to one social event in order to attend another?

I said I would go to a co-worker's party when he announced it more than a month ago, but a close friend of mine decided to have a birthday dinner on the same night. Both of them strongly want me to come. I accepted my co-worker's invitation first, but I am a more important person to my close friend. Would I be an etiquette-less jerk to attend the birthday dinner?

Anonymous

Yes, I wish I could snap my fingers and summon all the anguished letters from hosts who threw parties for 40 people only to have 15 show up. You said you'd go, so go. If your friend feels strongly, then s/he can move the birthday dinner to another night.

To answer your actual question, yes, there are circumstances under which you can miss an event for which you RSVP'd yes: when the thing you do instead is an unpleasant alternative to what you would have been doing. That includes being sick, being snowed in or stranded somewhere, helping someone who is sick or stranded, or dealing with a family emergency, be it a death in the family or just a flooded basement, or being held over at work. You can't trade up.

Dear Anonymous: Re: Party Etiquette — I disagree with Carolyn, etiquette be damned (or not). This is your close friend, and you clearly want to go to her party over his, not because you got a "better" invitation but because she is important to you. I think there's room to switch parties if you handle it well, which means being honest with the co-worker and telling him just that. I think the world might be a happier place if people weren't forced into doing things based on rigid social conventions.

Anonymous 2

If it were a hastily planned wedding or something both significant and one-time-only — say, if someone very close were unexpectedly coming through town from far away — I might agree with you. If this close friend were sick or moving away, that would count, too.

But we're having this conversation, absolutely, because of a "better" invitation. Honoring commitments isn't a matter of "rigid social conventions," it's a matter of showing respect for the fact that hosting is a laborious bit of generosity to one's guests. Even when it's done with pleasure (as it should be), it still takes a lot of effort and it's still a slap in the face when someone says, "I know you knocked yourself out and that I said I'd

THE STYLE INVITATIONAL

REPORT FROM WEEK 868 in which we asked rather unspecifically for nerdy, quantitatively leaning musings:



"Why isn't Santa's workshop always portrayed in darkness in the days before Christmas? Um, winter? High northern latitude? Any of this sinking in?" (Jeff Contompasis, Ashburn)

GEEK TRAGEDY: HONORABLE MENTIONS

It's ironic that the lead in "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum" was played by Zero Mostel, since the Romans had no numeral to represent zero.

(Craig Dykstra, Centreville)

Not only does it take on average 63 percent less time to walk up an escalator than just to stand, but it's also the best way to look up skirts.

(Kevin Dopart)

Turns out cleanliness isn't really next to godliness, it's next to cleanly. At least it is in my dictionary.

(Russell Beland)

If you want to give 110 percent, do you have to work 26.4/7.7?

(Edmund Conti, Raleigh, N.C.)

Few of God's wonders are as inspiring as a waterfall: Ah... wide-angle lens, 1/8-second exposure (without a tripod), f-stop, let's see...

(Mae Scanlan, Washington, photographer of the book "Beautiful America's Washington, D.C.")

It's not accurate to talk about global warming, since the Earth's core is really hot already. I always remind people to call it global surface warming.

(Martin Bancroft, Rochester, N.Y.)

Well, she said I'd never change. So I pointed out, "Au contraire: I replace body cells at a rate of 200,000 per day, especially intestinal lining cells, which last only five days..."

(M.C. Dorman, Scottsdale, Ariz.)

If pollywolly doodle all day, how long does a monowollu doodle?

(Tom Kreitzberg, Silver Spring)

You know what doesn't make sense about "The Flintstones"? Between work and home, Fred's car reconfigures itself from two to four-passenger mode. That sort of variable seating would not have been offered back then, even in the New Stone Age.

(Jeff Contompasis)

The average IQ is 100. The good news is that you are above average. The bad news is that you are frighteningly outnumbered.

(Brad Alexander, Wanneroo, Australia)

Miley Cyrus's "See You Again" begins, "I've got my sights set on you, and I'm ready to aim." But if you have your sights set, you've already aimed. Why didn't anyone explain this to her?

(Jeff Contompasis)

Online discussion Have a question for the Empress or want to talk to some real Losers? Join the Style Conversational at washingtonpost.com/styleconversational.



BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

Week 872: Har Monikers

Agrab: Scramble to answer the phone (Alexander Graham Bell). Geke: Someone who prances around downtown screaming during rainstorms (Gene Kelly).

The District's own Kevin Dopart, whose perfect combination of impressive smarts, obsessive persistence and massive geekiness (see this week's results) have helped him become the top-Losing Loser in each of the past four years, suggests another neologism contest based on people's names: Combine the first parts of each word in a famous person's or character's name — in order — and define it or use it in a sentence that somehow refers to its source, as in Kevin's own examples above. You must use at least the first letter in each word in the name.

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. And for the lucky person who'd never be seen in a Loser T-shirt, second place wins this stylish drop-waist dress designed and created from two T-shirts from early in the Empress's reign (hence the slogan "Under New Mismanagement") by 60-time Loser Barbara Turner of Takoma Park, who models it here.

Other runners-up win their choice of a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt or yearned-for Loser Mug. Honorable Mentions get one of the lusted-after Style Invitational Loser Magnets. First Offenders get a smelly, tree-shaped air "freshener" (Fir Stink for their First Ink). One prize per entrant per week. Send your entries by e-mail to losers@washpost.com or by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, June 14. Put "Week 872" in the subject line of your e-mail, or it risks being ignored as spam. Include your name, postal address and phone number with your entry. Contests are judged on the basis of humor and originality. All entries become the property of The Washington Post. Entries may be edited for taste or content. Results to be published July 3. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. The revised title for next week's results is by Kevin Dopart; this week's honorable-mentions subhead is by Craig Dykstra.

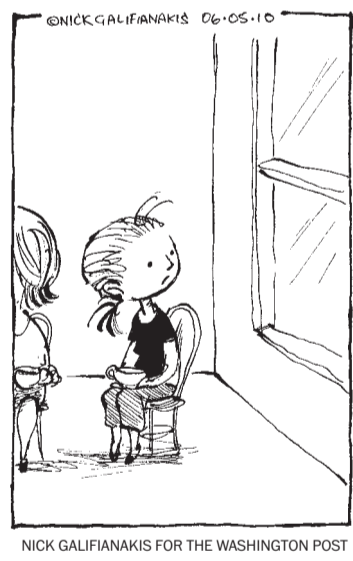


Next Week: Clue us in, or Retrogrid

Barbara Turner will give you the T-shirt dress off her back.

come, but I'm going to pass because I like my other friend better." If the original party has a heavy turnout and isn't table-locked, then the RSVP'er can make a polite appearance and then ditch for the dinner. But otherwise, the host has feelings that need to be treated with more care, in this case, than one's own.

Read the whole transcript or join the discussion live at noon Fridays on www.washingtonpost.com/discussions.



NICK GALIFANAKIS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

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PLANNING AN EVENT WE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT? TELL US. SEND LISTINGS INFORMATION TO EVENTS@WASHINGTONPOST.COM

Bars, bands and birthdays on the town

In this week's Going Out Guide chat, the Gurus took your questions about new bars around town, entertaining out-of-towners, birthday plans at PX and more. Check out the highlights below, and don't forget to join the Gurus for their Got Plans? chat every Thursday at 1 p.m. at washingtonpost.com.

New M St. Bar: Hey, Fritz, I was walking down M Street and saw what looked like a new bar called the Mighty Pint... Have you been there yet? Is it worth trying?

Fritz Hahn: I just made my first visit last night, and it's kind of a cleaned-up, stripped-down Madhatter. They exposed the brick on the walls, put in benches and flat screens and really opened the place up. (The upstairs is almost unrecognizable.) The gimmick is that all beers and mixed drinks come in pint glasses; they even sell 16-ounce PBR cans. Daily happy hour doesn't sound too bad: from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m., \$3 Miller Lite pints and \$6 pints of any mixed drink you want.

The District: I have a friend visiting me this weekend from out of town. I was thinking of taking her to the Dupont/Kalorama Museum Walk Tour on Sunday. Any helpful tips? Does it involve a lot of walking?

Stephanie Merry: It involves as much walking as you want — you certainly don't have to go to all 10 museums. If I weren't leaving town, then my two must-hit stops would be the Celebration of Textiles at the Textile Museum and Jazz 'n' Families Fun Day at the Phillips Collection. I should also mention that there will be free shuttles stopping by the different locations.

PX, Alexandria: I want to take my girlfriend to PX for her birthday; do I really need reservations? The Web site is a little confusing about whether or not you need a reservation to just sit at the bar, instead of



KEVIN WESTENBERG

THE BAND'S ALL HERE: Arcade Fire comes to Merrweather on Aug. 6; tickets go on sale soon.

sitting in the blue room. Fritz Hahn: Yes, you should make reservations if you're going Thursday-Saturday. No standing is allowed, so once the bar and the couches are full, no one can enter. With a place like PX — and a girlfriend's birthday — I would rather be safe than sorry, you know?

Arcade Fire: So most of the Arcade Fire tickets for other cities went on sale Wednesday and sold out quickly, but the Merrweather date [Aug. 6] is still just "on sale soon." Any idea when I need to schedule myself

out of all work meetings to have any hope of getting to the show? David Malitz: I'm thinking they will be on sale June 11. It's at Merrweather, so it's an IMP show. This week IMP had a Belle & Sebastian show to put on sale. Similar audiences, they don't want to lose any \$\$.

Arlington: Okay, Fritz. I'll give you until next Thursday if you need it, but will you be compiling a list of soccer bars for the World Cup? I know Ghana

Cafe for Ghana, but what about North Korea? Fritz Hahn: Yes. It's running in... Friday's Weekend section, so it should be up by chat time next week at the latest, and I'm pushing for even earlier. I just have to, you know, finish writing it first. North Korea is a tough one. (I would watch them play Argentina at El Patio, a notoriously good Argentine hangout in Rockville, though.) For more information, search for any of the boldfaced terms on www.goingoutguide.com.

DOONESBURY FLASHBACKS BY GARRY TRUDEAU



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