

Steering Conversations

Written by L.A. Plume

Wednesday, 10 September 2014 06:30



Dear L. A. Plume,

I'm writing this to you from a social event, which happens to be a cocktail river cruise. One of the guests has incited a conversation about politics with the captain of the ship, so now, instead of enjoying information about the history and wildlife of the area we are listening to a heated debate.

The other guests are rolling their eyes also, but they are sedate elderly couples seated in the back so there is no hope of their intervening. When things like this happen, what can be done to steer the conversation back on track?

Alba

Dear Alba,

If you've been reading this column for awhile you will know that my very pet peeves are people

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talking with food in their mouths, and introducing politics into polite conversation. Cocktail cruise? Push the offender overboard is my first thought, but that's not very polite either; so ask a question that will veer the conversation in an entirely different direction, such as, "Would you like to know the details of my last colonoscopy?" When they look at you like you have two heads then demurely respond, "That's how I feel about your political conversation. Could we please get back to the subject at hand?"

A. Plume

Dear Ms.Plume,

I have some new neighbors, and as lovely as they are, their life experience is less than worldly; about half of the time we don't connect when we're talking and we're not talking about big words here. They say beer when I say cocktail, they say truck when I say vehicle. I'm embarrassed and so are they. Should I try to change the way I talk when I speak to them or is it okay if I just continue to explain myself when necessary?

Jae

Dear Jae,

This brings to mind a time when I went into a pawnshop on the edge of the Everglades and the owner made a presumption about what we were looking for and told us there was no jewelry there that day. I wished I'd asked for a chain saw but I bit, and asked where the jewelry was, even though my friend was in search of DVDs. When finally asked, the owner told us that the jewelry was at The Mullet Festival on Marco Island. I took a chance and asked if that was the festival where, if you couldn't decide, you could mull it over. He looked at me like I was seriously demented and said, "Lady, a mullet is a feesh!" I can't help you with this issue other than to say that if you understand their vocabulary, just use it.

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A. Plume

Dear L.A.Plume,

What is the etiquette, if there is actually any, for correcting a docent in a park, museum, etc. if you know their information is erroneous? They are often volunteers, and occasionally paid people, and to correct them in front of the group might be construed as criticism, but if they are feeding wrong information to people, should they be so allowed?

Jayne

Dear Jayne,

Good question: Correct information or political correctness? The best way to handle that may be to say you were “under the impression that . . .” and tell him/her what you know in a way that isn’t confrontational or challenging but leaves room for discussion.

L.A.Plume