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PREPARING FOR THE BALL

Gemma Saccasan

Fashion Designer & Image Consultant
www.gemmasaccasan.com.au

Introduction

Tony Shannon was kind enough to invite me here tonight to have a chat on “the done thing” for the Warrane Ball this Friday, so I’ll just run few a few ideas with you.

I’m sure you’re all looking forward to Friday night though if you don’t know the girl you are taking very well or it’s your first big event, you may be feeling a little nervous.

The most important thing to prepare, I think, is that you have invited someone out, and the main object of the your evening should be to do what you can to make sure that your partner enjoys herself. It will be a memorable evening if she goes away with a very good impression of you with good memories of a very enjoyable evening.

What a girl really looks for in a man is someone who will respect her and behave well, showing an interest in her for her sake, not for how she makes you feel. I remember a great talk that my son, who is now 22, went to and the speaker made a very good point: do you want to be a protector or a predator?

I’ll leave that idea with you and get onto more pedestrian details. I’ve grouped my ideas into 3 parts because research has shown that people assess others on 3 things:

1. How you look
2. How you conduct yourself
3. What you have to say.

So, the first thing is how you look.

This comprises what you wear and your personal presentation. Starting with what you wear: It’s normal to have this clearly stated on the invitation to save confusion. So, has this been nominated? These occasions are traditionally black tie but it is becoming more and more usual to see a young man wearing a suit. Black tie is certainly more romantic, but a suit is perfectly acceptable. Don’t let your budget stand in your way – lots of secondhand stores stock good quality dinner suits and business suits. (Just ring first.)

Invest in dry cleaning the suit before the big night – this is obvious and makes a good impression. Same with your shirt and tie and polish your shoes! This is a small detail that is easy to overlook but all these details say that you care about yourself and that you are able to care about others.

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Personal presentation also includes general grooming so ensure that everything is top notch in that area with for example, well groomed, clean hair, clean nails and a little bit of aftershave, but nothing that will overpower anyone.

It's traditional also that you buy your partner a corsage for the evening and that you ring her a couple of days beforehand and ask her the colour of her dress because you would like to buy a corsage that goes with it. You can also ask her if she has a favourite flower – asking this shows you care about what she likes, you're not just doing "the right thing."

The second thing is how you conduct yourself.

Remember the focus is on you going out of your way to make sure she has a good evening but also with the balance of not being a clinging ivy.

You should arrange to pick her up and drop her home from where she lives. If she lives at home with her parents, you will score major brownie points if you go in and introduce yourself to them. A car if you drive and can get access to one, is good. However, if you can only get there by public transport, just give her a quick ring and let her know that's what's happening. It's a good idea to arrange to go with a couple of mates and their dates.

Always make sure you introduce her straightaway to anyone she doesn't know. It's very rude to leave her hanging and will make her feel unimportant – this is not what you are trying to do.

As far as introductions go and who to introduce to whom, the rule of thumb is to use the name of the person with the most senior rank first. With your mates, this is your date eg, Sarah, I'd like you meet Joe. Joe, this is Sarah. With others, older people or senior people of the college, use their name first, eg. Mr. Shannon, I'd like to introduce you to Sarah Smith. Sarah, this is Mr. Shannon. Adding what is called a "tag" gives them something to talk about: eg. Sarah, this is Joe. Joe lives at Warrane with me and is studying science or, Mr. Shannon, this is Sarah Smith. Sarah is from Wagga and is here studying medicine.

A few very important details to remember:

- ALWAYS hold doors open for her and let her walk through first, even if she is a slow coach.
- ALWAYS make sure she has a drink in her hand before you.
- ALWAYS enquire from time to time, if there is anything you can get her during the evening.
- ALWAYS make sure you pace yourself with what you drink. There is nothing worse than a partner who drinks too much.
- ALWAYS make sure everyone is served, in particular your partner, before you start eating. If tea and coffee is serve yourself, make sure you do this for her.
- ALWAYS follow basic table manners, which I'm sure you all know: don't talk with food in your mouth or chew with your mouth open and with cutlery, work from the outside in, one set per course and don't wave your knife and fork about.
- ALWAYS make sure she is not sitting by herself for more than 5 minutes while you chat to your mates and she has no one to speak to, though as I said before, do this without being clingy. I know some girls behave badly and might go off and ignore you. In this case, look around for those girls who have been left hanging (there is always one) and show courtesy by going and chatting to them.
- ALWAYS excuse yourself before going to the bathroom or going to chat to a friend.
- ALWAYS make sure that you dance, even if you hate dancing or you're not good at it. You don't have to be on the floor for the whole night but it is particularly frustrating to attend an affair like this with someone who refuses to dance. Forget about yourself and remember you are there to make sure your date has a good evening. Save the bulk of the dances for your partner but it is acceptable to ask another girl you know to dance, but first excusing yourself to your partner.

The third thing to think about and to prepare is what you talk about.

There are generally safe topics that a girl likes to discuss:

1. Family. Ask about her brothers and sisters and parents and chat about yours. This is generally a very welcome topic to a girl.
2. What she likes to do and what you like to do. The idea is to show an interest in her life. If you are good at talking, make sure you don't do all the talking. If you are not good at talking, tell her more details than you would normally discuss, in order to keep the conversation flowing.
3. Her work/ study and yours.
4. Current topics: the election, but don't get bogged down in this. If you state an opinion, back it up pleasantly, don't get aggressive. Other people are allowed to have different opinions!

Don't be negative. The old adage "if you don't have something nice to say, don't say it" holds true. If you don't agree, just say "Do you think so?" and leave it alone. The ball is not the place to have a fight.

Concluding Comments

Some of you may have heard of the personality types. It's good to know this and get to know yourself because then you know where to improve yourself. Socially, this will make you better company. I've included a brief outline in the hand out with recommendations for each and I'll just run through these briefly.

- Choleric: go-getters, determined, energetic. A people-person. Watch out for being bossy! This is not attractive to a girl.
- Sanguine: life of the party, love attention, scatty. Sanguines make very good company when they tone down the loudness.
- Melancholic: thinkers, sensitive, lovers of beauty. Make an effort to see things in the positive. Be determined to say 3 positive things at the ball where you feel like criticising.
- Phlegmatic: easy to get on with, agreeable. Fight your natural inclination to laziness.

Also, last but not least, pray! I know that not all of you are Catholic but don't leave prayer out. Guaranteed, you will have a much better time if you pray for one!



- ✓ Protector or predator?
- ✓ Your objective: to make sure your partner has an enjoyable evening.
- ✓ Black tie/business suit and personal grooming. Don't forget to polish your shoes!
- ✓ Make clear arrangements with your partner about being picked up and dropped home. If picking her up from home, go in and introduce yourself to her parents.
- ✓ Remember your manners: focus on putting her first.
- ✓ Dance, even if you hate it!
- ✓ Prepare topics of conversation before the big night but remember the ball is not the place to have a fight; give way.
- ✓ What personality type or blend are you and how can you improve?

From "Personality Plus" by Florence Littauerⁱ:

- ❖ **Choleric:** This is the **commander-type**. Choleric are dominant, strong, decisive, stubborn and even arrogant. A choleric is focused on getting things done but can run rough-shod over others.

Practice not being bossy!

- ❖ **Melancholic:** This is the **mental-type**. Their typical behaviour involves thinking, assessing, making lists, evaluating the positives and negatives and general analysis of facts. A melancholic is a highly talented person, they have brilliant ideas, although they can paralyse themselves with over-analysis. Lists and "doing things the right way" are characteristics of this type.

Practice saying positive things!

- ❖ **Sanguine:** This is the **social-type**. They enjoy fun, socialising, chatting, telling stories and are fond of promising the world, because that's the friendly thing to do. A sanguine gets on well with people and get others excited about issues, but cannot always be relied upon to get things done. They love interacting with others and play the role of the entertainer in group interactions. They have a tendency to over-promise and under-deliver..

Make an effort to quieten down and let others have their turn.

- ❖ **Phlegmatic:** This is the **flat-type**. They are easy going, laid back, nonchalant, unexcitable and relaxed. Desiring a peaceful environment above all else. A phlegmatic is neutral – they tend not to actively upset people, but their indifference may frustrate people. They try not to make decisions and generally go for the *status quo*. They care about people and harmony.

Try to combat natural inhibitions and voice some opinions.

ⁱ Littauer, Florence. 2004. *Personality Plus: How to Understand Others by Understanding Yourself*. Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell.