

During the fall of last year Mayor Rudolph Giuliani of New York was admonished for rudeness because he directed his aides to insist that Yasir Arafat remove himself from an event put on by the City of New York at the Lincoln Center, to which, Mayor Giuliani insists, Arafat was not invited. The most recently updated and rewritten version of the Amy Vanderbilt Etiquette Book does not address the problem of gate crashing. "I didn't address it," said Nancy Tuckerman, co-author of the new edition of the Etiquette Book, "because it's so appallingly rude, I can't imagine anyone doing it."

Assuming, for the sake of discussion, that Yasir Arafat had not been invited to the event at Lincoln Center, was Mayor Giuliani justified in insisting that he leave? If so, why? If not, Why not?

MODERATOR'S ANSWER: Insisting that Arafat remove himself from the event at Lincoln Center was ethically inappropriate. In the case of an event sponsored by the City of New York, with attendance by invitation, Mayor Giuliani necessarily assumed the role of the event's host, and in this role his primary responsibility was to make the event enjoyable for all of the guests. Insisting that Arafat leave, after he had arrived, was a kind of action likely to cause disruption, embarrassment, discomfort, or bad feeling not just for Arafat, but for other persons who had been invited to the event -- especially those seated near Arafat. If Arafat's presence would have deprived an invited guest of his or her seat, this would have posed a more difficult problem. Even in this situation, however, Mayor Giuliani's principal responsibility as host would have been to make a strenuous effort to resolve the situation in a way causing the least disruption.

Case from the February 3, 1996 Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl. Copyright Robert Ladenson, Center for the Study of Ethics in the Professions, Illinois Institute of Technology, 1995.