

The 10 Minute Cleanup



My husband invented one of the best kitchen innovations of all time.

It's called The 10 Minute Cleanup.

I'm going to tell you all about it.

This works magically at the end of any dinner party. Any size. And by that, I mean I have done this with dinner for almost 100 people, but it can be done for dinner for four or even six. No number is out of the question.

We started this about 20 years ago and the plan still works well today. The "rules of the dinner party" have changed. (But that's the topic of a column yet to come).

Let me tell you about some of the reasoning behind this and then I'll give you the "rules/procedures."

No one really likes to clean up after a party. Some people won't even host a party because all they can think of is the nightmare of the piles of dishes and glassware that will be waiting for them in the kitchen after everyone leaves.

The truth is we found out people want to help. And you can make

it fun.

That's the logic behind the 10 Minute Cleanup. You will have your guests play a small part in helping to clean up after the big meal. They will not do everything; but when every person tackles a small cleanup task and works at it for ten minutes, it helps tremendously!

Even guys who rush off to watch the football game after they have eaten their last bite can be cajoled into helping with the 10 Minute Cleanup. And why? Because it's only 10 minutes. All guys just want to know is when they are going to be done with the task – and they can handle 10 minutes of tidying.

So here it goes!

Rules and Procedures:

The first thing you do is gather everyone in the kitchen or even bring a kitchen timer to the dining table. If it's a large group, just get everyone's attention and make an announcement. The 10 Minute Cleanup is about to begin, and you need your guests' participation (as many as you can get). Ask for volunteers. This way, you get the folks who are enthusiastic about helping out. Most have had a little bit to drink so they usually laugh...at first. When they realize you're serious it gets even better.

When you have your volunteers, you gather them aside and suggest the duties and they get to pick which thing they want to do.

The jobs are –

Runners, Scrapers, A Washer, A Dryer, Leftover Department, Dishwasher Loader, Décor Dismantling, Host.

Timer: The first thing is to set a timer for 10 Minutes. Show

everyone it's set. Don't turn it on yet.

Music: Before anyone starts their job, you start the music. Turn it up loud enough so everyone can sing along. Pick music your group likes. You may have more than one generation participating so keep that in mind. I have very successfully defaulted to anything by Dean Martin. Every generation seems to know the words. But then again, I'm a big Dean fan and I'm old. You choose. Lots of oldies work. Just find songs people like to belt out.

Then you do the "ready, set go" thing. Tell people to stay calm. Don't rush. It will all get done. Have fun. Tell them they will all be done when the timer goes off. Then GO. Start the music (it's usually 2-3 songs).

Runners: These folks do nothing but remove the plates and serving dishes from the party area and bring them to the kitchen. They give plates with food on them to the Scraper(s). They give serving dishes with food in them to the Leftovers Department. Then they go back and get more.

Assuming you have two hosts who know the kitchen well it's a good idea to station one of them in the kitchen to answer questions and direct the team. Most often the host (my husband) is a washer, but he also knows where the Tupperware is and can point.

Scraper(s): This one is pretty easy too. Give this person a rubber spatula. They are in charge of scraping extra food left on the plates into the garbage disposal. If one is not available (it might be underwater if you have one sink) then they can scrape it into a big bowl for later grinding in the disposal, into the garbage pail, or even into the compost pail to take outside later. They just keep scraping until that's all done.

Dishwasher/Dishwasher Loader: This can be one or two people depending on the size of the party and the kitchen layout. They take the dishes that have been scraped and either wash them or put them in the dishwasher. I have been AMAZED at how careful these folks are with plates that cannot be put in the dishwasher, or antiques. If you have really old glassware that you don't trust anyone but yourself to wash just have them set that aside and it can wait; even til the next morning when it's quiet.

Dryer: Hand these folks a dishtowel and they'll have everything they need to complete their job. Dry and stack.

Leftovers Department: The job for this person is to take the leftovers from the serving dishes and put them in containers to save. Sometimes it just needs to be covered and put in the fridge. If you have something like a big turkey to take apart sometimes this person can get started or they can just wrap it up so you can do it later. They are getting the extras into those containers so they can go in the fridge. If you want "to go" boxes put together for folks, they can do that, too.

Décor Dismantling: Some folks are meant for this job. What they do is take all the cloth napkins off the table and put them in the laundry or set them aside. They fold up the table runner/cloth, take apart the candles/holders and set it all on a counter somewhere so the next day the host can just put the stuff away. If the dining table or the bar area is messy, they can be the ones to wipe it up so it's all clean. Sometimes, they even do a quick vacuum of the area.

Host: So, what does the Main Host do? Well, in our family that would be me. At a huge party, the dessert is probably on a buffet or already served, but if not, I'm the one getting the dessert ready to be served and getting the coffee going. I DO

NOT suggest the Main Host try to take a position at any of the workstations. That person needs to be mobile so you can point to where you want things to go. They might be able to be put dishes back in the cupboard or you'll designate an area or areas where you want things staged so it will be easy for you to put them away in the morning. I have them put serving dishes in one area, glassware in another, and a third area for the plates.

When the timer dings... it's all over. Everyone stops wherever they are at. It's absolutely AMAZING how the whole thing magically gets done in that amount of time. Sometimes folks are even done a little early and can go off and watch the game or play a game. If you are not done there are always a few who love to stay in the kitchen to chat, so they finish it up. But believe me when I tell you how well this works.

And the feeling the next day is even better. Instead of staying up til the wee hours washing dishes, you get to go to bed at a reasonable hour and wake up to a house that won't take long to get back into normal operation. With huge parties, it has taken me up to an hour to put all the stuff away, but imagine how much longer it would have taken if I had to clean it all up myself.

Let me end by telling you a cute story. We had a holiday party with all the neighbors for years. The first time I did this there were about 70 people. All couples. When I asked for volunteers one woman yelled out, "Let the guys do it!" Momentary silence and the hands of guys started going up. They were volunteering!

They all met me in the kitchen. Because they were all dressed up for the fancy dinner, I got them each an apron from my apron collection and they put them on. Then they went to work. I wish I still had the pictures. They were priceless. Everyone was laughing, singing, and getting the job done.

I was also gobsmacked by the number of guys who came up to me to thank me for asking them to help. They got to know some neighbors better and bonded; and besides, they had a blast.

I hope you have a blast going forward with your entertaining. This idea sure makes the hard part easier.

Cheers,