

Wine Coach Fills His Student's Cups With Confidence

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By Terri Yue Jones

New York---Mairead Courtney suffered an embarrassing humiliation at a business meal: Confused and somewhat intimidated by a restaurant wine list, she made a quick choice.

"I ordered red wine, but one of the guests called the sommelier over and asked for another bottle because he didn't think it went with the food" the New York based event planner recalled, wineing. "It made me feel like I didn't know anything."

Peeved and embarrassed by having her wine inexperience so publicly spotlighted, she enrolled in a wine class taught by Kevin Zraly, one of the country's prominent wine coaches.

Zraly, has coached corporate executives, Wall Street analysts and brokers and conference and event coordinators at such firms as Merrill Lynch, Salomon Smith Barney, American Express, Coca-Cola and Bentley Motor Cars.

For traveling businesspeople, "You want to have fun, and you have to have dinner at business conferences," he said. "My approach is, take out the lies, myths and other tales of wine."

Boom times on the stock market raised interest in—and spending on—wine, but any time is a good time to indulge, Zraly said. "When the economy is good, people drink. When the economy is bad, people drink more."

His students are an eclectic group, brought together by the desire not to be intimidated by wine or commit any oenological *faux pas*.

Jonathan Bassi, general manager of the Englewood Country Club in Paramus, N.J., said he's in the class to achieve a comfort level in dealing with wine at work.

"I wanted to know what regions of wine to go for," said Joe Conguista, who owns an auto body shop in Hillsdale, N.J. "I'm learning to find wines that cost \$20 but taste like \$100."

Roger Camp, a vice president of Merrill Lynch's Private Client Group, signed himself, his wife and his daughter up for one of Zraly's courses to give him more leverage at business dinners and to learn more about wine as a family project.

And regardless of the economy, Zraly says, wine will always be a key part of any business person's life. "It used to be cigars, golf and wine," he said. "Now it's food, golf and wine."