

# **On Being a Royal Retainer**

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Being a Royal retainer can range from picking up a shift at Pennsic to being a member of the Royal household for that reign or anything in between.

Regardless of which role you have, remember that you're a very important part of Live Theatre. Without you, Our King and Queen just look like a man and a woman wearing crowns. What makes them a King and Queen is the way they are treated, and that the job of the attendants and those around them. Make sure that when "the audience" is around, you use titles, bow and curtsy, and do all you can to make them look regal.

In history there were courtiers, ladies in waiting and other various types of nobles who served the royalty. As a retainer in these current Middle Ages you are of noble birth. You were someone important before you became a retainer.

You wait upon, serve, or attend Their Majesties. You do not work for them. You are a retainer. You are not a servant. You serve, but are never servile.

## **Attending for the Day or a Shift**

If you have signed up for a shift at an event you will most likely be directly attending TRM for a set period of time. You will rarely be alone, most likely you will be with one or two other experienced retainers or other members of the Royal household.

Do not feel slighted if TRM defers to them to run errands or to assist them. They are usually more familiar with what is needed and its easier to ask them to do something than it is to try to explain it in detail to someone new.

Do remember that your role is important. You are part of the "show". You are also needed to help with errands, keeping them fed and watered, on schedule and just generally there to help.

Very importantly you will be privy to a whole lot of stuff that shouldn't be made public. Part of what makes you a trusted attendant is your ability to hear, but not hear. Keep things to yourself. This being said, do not be offended if you are asked to step away from a conversation. TRM are very conscious of discussing sensitive information in front of others and they may not know you well enough to feel comfortable to speak in front of you.

### **Signing up for a shift**

If you would like to help there are a couple of different ways to approach this. One: look on the Royal Website <http://www.eastkingdom.org/trm/> and see if they have the Head Retainer listed. Contact them and say that you are interested in attending at a particular event.

Or, at the event itself, discretely ask a member of the household or entourage, who the Head Retainer is or if they are not at the event whoever is in charge of retainers that day. Then request to speak to them in regards to volunteering during the day.

### **Reporting for your shift**

- Be on time
- Speak to the retainers on duty, find out anything you might need to know.
- Make sure you know where things like their drinking cups are, the Queen's basket, does she have a notebook to write gifts ect in, and whatever else that they may need quickly.

## While on duty

- TRM shouldn't have to hold stuff. If you see something in their hands, take it from them and dispose of it (either put it away or throw it away). This also means that, for instance, if one of them has eaten a strawberry, and is holding the green stem, you take it and get rid of it.
- Have your Royals "stuff" close by at all times. If she likes a particular candy or soda, try to make sure you always have some handy (they will usually have it in their basket) It's not a bad idea to carry your own empty basket or string bag to carry the stuff.
- While you are on duty, many people will approach asking to speak with TRM. This is a delicate situation, because you don't ever want someone to feel like they're not important. It is your duty as a retainer to politely take their name and request them to wait. If TRM's are in a conversation or otherwise busy, wait until you can get their attention then relay the message. They may ask you to go back and find out what the person needs of them, or they may just ask you to bring the person to them.

Chances are, TRM will be able to talk to them. However, they may have a meeting scheduled, or may want to look into the matter first, or they may just not be up to it. Find out what TRM want to do, then go back to the person.

Don't ever tell them that TRM are not interested in what they have to say. If TRM can't see them right now, say so, but give them a suggestion of when TRM might be available – after court, after the tourney, whatever suits the occasion and/or whatever TRM has suggested.

- There will be times when people give gifts to TRM. When you are on duty it is part of your responsibility to notate who gave them what, when, and an address to send a thank you. It is important that you know who gave what gift, and get that right. If you can't get personal information, get their SCA name and their shire. They can probably be tracked through the seneschal. The Royals generally carry some form of book in which this information is written into. Always check with the Head Retainer or the retainer who you are relieving to make sure you know where it is.
- There will be times that the Royal's may ask for your opinion or assistance with a situation. Never give your opinion or try to tell them what they should do unless you are asked. Too many times well meaning attendants will jump and in try to interject their opinions.
- Like a good waiter, a good retainer is attentive. The best retainer is a little bit psychic. Also, never, ever, leave them alone. You should even go into the ladies' room with your Royal. One of your jobs is to field people, make sure TRM get where they need to be, and not get sidetracked by other distractions.

## **On Being a Member of the Court or Royal Household**

You may have been invited to be part of the Royal Household perhaps as a result of giving excellent service while doing a shift previously, or perhaps you find yourself a Champion to one of the Royals. Either way you are now a member of the Court. Welcome. You are now part of a very fun and exciting, if not exhausting part of the game. If you have never served in a Royal Household there are a few things to be aware of.

### **THE BASICS**

There is generally some form of list group or email list for members of the Royal Household. This will be your primary means of communication within the group. It is general courtesy to keep the conversations to relevant topics and not use it for general chatter. This is where you will find out what events they are attending, who is needed for help. Sign up lists for events are generally found here as well.

Pre registering: If you are going to be attending an event it is common courtesy to pre register for the events, especially if you are staying for feasts. Do not assume that just because you are a member of the entourage that you will receive special treatment.

### **REPORTING AND DIVISION OF LABOR**

First, we need to know who is responsible for whom. Generally speaking, there will be a Head Retainer, who is responsible for the Ladies. She may also be in charge of the Gentlemen, or there may be a Captain of the Guard responsible for them. Either way, find out who is in charge, and let them know that you're ready and able to work. If you are reporting for a shift at an event like Pennsic or other Royal Progresses, the Head Retainer is the one who will assign your job duties. They are also the ones who general schedule attendant for court.

For members of the Royal household it is important to know who is responsible for what job. Generally speaking, the men are in charge of the heavy carrying, and the women are in charge of the other "stuff." In general the Men set up the thrones, the banners, the tables, and similar things. The Ladies make sure the goblets are set out, that they are always filled, that a luncheon plate is ready and delivered, that feast gear is set and cleared away, and things like that.

As a member of the Court, you should make every effort to make sure Their Majesties are packed and ready to leave before you leave the site. There will be times when you can't stay, and that's understandable. However, theirs is always a lot of stuff that needs to be packed into boxes and into the cars and trucks, even ahead of time and every bit helps. If you can't stay, make sure the Head Retainer knows that you're leaving.

### **WHEN YOU ARRIVE**

First, see if there is a Royal Room. This is where all the "behind the scenes" stuff happens. You may be the first of the entourage to arrive on site, so you may be the first in the Royal Room. You don't need to stay there and wait, but keep checking back until more of the troupe arrives.

If there is no Royal Room, and you are the first one on site, find out where the autocrat wants TRM to put their stuff. Remember, TRM need to work and we need a place to store the kingdom and personal regalia -- preferably all together -- so ask. Most autocrats will already have a space set aside. Once the Royals are on site the first line of duty will be to get their vehicle unloaded and get them dressed and ready to go. They will normally cover the day's activities with the household and the day's schedule is usually planned.

### **THE ROYAL ROOM**

The Royal Room is just that -- Royal. It is intended for use by Their Majesties and Their Heirs. It is a place of business for the handling of scrolls and other affairs of state, and place of respite to sit down and relax in peace, away from the maddening crowds. It should be kept clean and not cluttered.

It should be understood that the Royal Room is not where you store your gear, where you change into garb, or where you do anything else.

That said, there may very well be a place for your things in the Royal Room. And you may very well be able to change there, to sit and relax there, and so on. Just don't expect it. Sometimes the Royal Room is quite small, and simply can't accommodate more than the Royals and their gear, both kingdom and personal. Plan on putting your stuff elsewhere, rather than expecting to use the Royal Room, TRM or the Head Retainer will normally let you know if the room is open for the use of the entourage.

There will normally be a Guard on duty at the Royal Room they are the ones who will screen entrants to the Royal Room. In general if someone approaches, the Guard will get their name and business, and relay this to the retainer on duty with TRM at that time. They will then find out whether or not TRM can see them at this time. If not, she will suggest an alternate time, or give the Guard whatever answer he needs. If you are on duty while in the Royal room make sure the Guard knows that you are.

*Always* check with TRM. Don't send anyone away without checking first, no matter how busy TRM look.

#### **WELL-MEANING SOULS**

You need to be particularly watchful of Well-Meaning Souls who believe they have TRM's best interests at heart. They can take over, unpack, move things around, and generally create such a lovely confusion that only they know what's going on.

This can get a little tricky when the people who want to take over think they're in charge. An autocrat may have specifically asked them to take care of TRM, and they feel honored and privileged to do this. And they feel they have the right to do so.

Regardless of what the autocrat may have said, these people are not there to tend to TRM. They are there to *assist you* in taking care of TRM. That's the job of the Royal Household.

The way to handle this situation is to remain in control, but let them help. Give them small jobs to do, ask them for information about the site, or generally make them feel useful. But you must not let them take over. That is how things are lost or broken, and it can potentially create a bad situation all around.

Occasionally, you may see an Unauthorized Person – defined as someone who is not on the Court, for the long term or the day – handling Their Majesties stuff or the Royal regalia. It's probably an honest attempt to help out, but you can't let them. Politely take it from them. If they insist, tell them that it's your job, that you'll get in trouble with me if you let them do it. If the person insists and starts getting awkward, let the Head Retainer handle it.

#### **VERY IMPORTANT INFO ABOUT "STUFF"**

Find out how your Royals want their "stuff" handled. In most cases, they've played the game long enough that they've lost things by too many people trying to help out. Learn whatever system they have found works best for them. Its part of the job to make sure that their stuff stays together, and that you know where it is at all times. Someone who is part of the Royal household should know what they brought.

Personal possessions as well as royal ones – belong in the Royal Room until such time as they are needed. For instance, do not bring the feast gear to the feast hall until it's time to use it. It makes sense to put things where they will be needed at the beginning of the event, but in practice, it just doesn't work well. Too many things get lost that way, and you can't find what you need when you need it.

If something has to be moved, make sure it is done by one of the Royal Household (or someone you trust). More importantly, make sure they understand that they are responsible for it, that it is their job to

know where that item is, and to make sure it gets back to TRM. Their job does not end with merely moving it.

### **FOOD**

Every retainer should know what their Royal wants to drink or eat that day. This may change from event to event, but will usually develop into something relatively consistent.

At every event, someone needs to supervise the food situation. This can include setting up and breaking down the feast gear and/or setting up a hostess tray for the Royal Room.

More importantly, it means making sure that people get fed and watered.

#### ***Their Food:***

TRM will often be too busy to eat lunch. However, if they don't eat, they will suffer for it. A plate needs to be made up, and brought to them wherever they are sitting in state, on the tourney field, or whatever.

Find out what they like and don't like, including allergies, preferences, favorite "I'm gonna die if I don't get some chocolate!" kind of things, and "You really don't expect me to eat that, do you?"

A sample luncheon plate would be: cheddar cheese slices, crackers, small slices of ham or other meat, fruit, soda or juice. They need finger food, or sandwiches, not anything messy or sloppy. They will generally provide the food; you just need to see to it that they get it when they need it.

#### ***Your Food:***

As you might expect, you should plan on providing your own food. TRM often bring snacks, and a hostess tray may be set out for visiting dignitaries and other guests who will be in the Royal Room. Although TRM are more than happy to share, consider it Good Form to bring your own food and add to theirs, rather than just snacking from the hostess tray. That way everyone eats, no one will run out of food, and everyone will be happy.

### **MEETINGS**

There will be times when TRM hold various meetings. You probably won't sit in on them, so you won't know exactly when they'll be finished. However, someone needs to be there waiting with a drink, and something to eat when they're through.

Order meetings can be long, and they'll get thirsty. Make sure they have something to drink and/or eat before the meeting starts. If they are having multiple meetings, fill their drinks between meetings, and make sure they have everything they need. If the meeting goes long, it is appropriate for a lady to discreetly check on them, refill the goblets, or bring food.

### **HIGH TABLE**

Find out very specifically how they want their table set. If one of them is left handed, this may make a difference. If they have children, will the children sit at High Table, or somewhere else? These things will usually be consistent, but there's always the chance that something will happen to change it.

Find out how your Royal wants to be tended. Some find it difficult to eat in front of people, and don't want you hovering over them. Some like to play it up big, and have you constantly refilling your goblet, just because it looks good to the audience.

Find out how your Royal wants to handle clearing away their things from the High Table. In many cases, TRM will ask that the dishes be scraped and put them into the plastic bags, for cleaning at home. Pack everything up as requested.

Make sure all the dinner accessories come home. This includes things like candles and candlesticks, salt and pepper shakers, corkscrews (which often get borrowed), lighters, and napkins. The easiest way to do that is to have the person who set the table also be the one who oversees clearing it.

## **COURT**

In the East, there is a court herald, who handles the “running” of the court. In some reigns, he’s virtually the “Master of Ceremonies” of the show. In other reigns, he merely reads the scrolls, and the King or Queen do much of the talking.

Anything “mundane” – soda bottles, a cooler, whatever – should be stowed out of sight.

Although you will likely process into court, it’s unlikely that you will be required to stay behind the thrones for the duration of court unless TRM are particularly shorthanded or you’re a masochist. The Head Retainer or Retainer in charge will generally have the schedule for standing in court done prior to court beginning. Check with them if you do want to attend in court.

During Court, the King and the Queen each need one personal attendant. That will be your sole job, to stand behind them, make sure the goblet is filled, and do whatever each of them needs. One of the ladies will attend the Queen, and either a King’s Man or a lady will attend the King. His Majesty’s squires generally have the right to stand behind him, in addition to whatever attendants he might have.

If you want find you need to go and sit down or if you are changing shifts in court make sure you leave court unobtrusively. Leave during an applause, or when a scroll recipient is returning to his seat. Don’t be a distraction to the proceedings.

## **PACKING UP**

No later than half an hour before the event ends, the packing starts. All the personal and kingdom property needs to be stored safely and ready to load into the vehicles. This may take a little time until everyone gets accustomed to what goes where. Ask where something goes instead of just putting it “someplace.” Your Royal has a system, and you will need to learn it.

## **LASTLY**

Taking Care of Yourself:

This may sound obvious, but sometimes people get so wrapped up in being a retainer, in helping nauseous, or simply can not move another step. At that point, you become the center of attention rather than TRM, and that’s not why we’re here. Yes, it happens now and then, when there is a glitch and something unexpected happens, and we take care of each other and move on.

But keep an eye out for yourself and the rest of the crew. When you need, tell whomever is in charge that you need to eat or take a break. They’ll appreciate that far more than they will having to pick you up off the floor because you’ve overdone.

Attending Royalty should be a lot of fun. If you’re not having fun, you’re doing it wrong. Smile! Enjoy yourself! You’ll be meeting new people, involved in lots of things you may never have done before, and generally having a grand time.