

# Bon Appétit

Reuben L. Goldberg (1883 – 1970) was a man of many talents. Born in San Francisco, Calif., he was a sculptor, cartoonist, author, engineer and inventor. He was also a founding member and the first president of the National Cartoonists Society.

Because of his work, he understood – perhaps more than most – the value of communication and, on the other hand, how misunderstandings can easily occur.

He told the story of the time he traveled to Europe on an ocean liner. Goldberg was assigned to a table with another single passenger. His companion was a Frenchman who spoke no English, and Goldberg spoke no French.

Each night, the Frenchman would be the last to arrive for dinner, and he would come to the table, click his heels, bow, and say, “Bon Appétit.” Goldberg would get up and reply, “Goldberg,” then shake his hand and sit down.



This routine went on for three or four nights. At that point, Goldberg happened to mention this to an acquaintance. “You know, it’s the strangest thing,” he said. “I’m sitting with a Frenchman in the dining room and at each meal, he tells me his name is Bon Appétit, and I have to tell him who I am.”

“No, no, no,” said the other man. “That’s not his name. That’s a French phrase for good appetite.”

“Oh,” said Goldberg. “I feel so stupid. Well, I’m going to have to correct that.”

That night, Goldberg came to the table late and the Frenchman was already seated. Goldberg bowed, clicked his heels, and said, “Bon Appétit.”

The Frenchman stood up and said, “Goldberg.”

The story illustrates how we may often take guesses at names of persons or facts of a matter, honestly believing that we know the truth, without verifying the information.

It also shows that we are never too old to learn, and oftentimes it’s as easy as asking.

– Beecher Hunter