



The Value of Good Manners

By Chanon Collins

Remember the popular book by Robert Fulghum, **All I Ever Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten?** While this book offered a light-hearted view of manners and etiquette, it still remains as a proven guide for good manners. One need only to take a moment to stroll through the workplace to see that the manners taught as a child have been completely disregarded, or greatly altered at the very least.

Why do we teach our children to remove their elbows from the table and avoid picking their teeth after a meal, but we fail to follow our own teachings at a business lunch? Better yet, why should we require our children to write a thank you note to a relative, ignoring the obvious illegible scribble, while we pass over opportunities to build relationships with others through written correspondence?

The excuses are many – no time, bad handwriting, too many emails, etc. – but no excuse is an acceptable one. The German writer, Goethe, believed that “a man’s manners are a mirror in which he shows his portrait.” Take a moment to examine your picture – what do you see?

There are a few basic points of etiquette essential to all successful people in business. Unless you have one of those jobs in which you never speak to people (whatever that job may be), your greatest opportunity to display your soft skills is with your co-workers. Recognizing the value of everyone in the organization will open many roads for advancement. Don’t overlook the support staff in your organization – these are usually the people who get things accomplished. Take notice of those responsible for the behind-the-scenes activities the next time you attend an in-house function.

Another area of business in which manners are usually left at the door is the business meeting. Effective meetings produce results and allow team members to continue to work productively. Remember your manners in a meeting: thank every team member who worked toward a positive end, make sure that everyone present has all the necessary materials to participate, and allow everyone an opportunity to speak. Loquacious behavior is a deterrent to timely meetings and does not paint a pretty picture for your etiquette portrait.

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Reviewing your modes of communication will also reveal insights about your business etiquette, or lack thereof. Take phone calls and emails – how do you respond to your messages? If you return all of your phone calls, you are displaying exemplary manners. This is an arduous task, but all phone calls must be returned, even if you don't have the information requested, you are illustrating your care and concern for that relationship.

The birth of electronic mail spawned the deletion of good manners across the globe. Most people seem to think that the rules of written correspondence do not apply to emails; however, they are greatly mistaken. Emails should be treated in the same manner as the written word. Always address and sign your emails and do not send superfluous information in the body of the message – most people are not interested in the plethora of email addresses that accompany forwarded messages. Another tip for email writing – do not write using all capital letters. It conveys too much intensity and is quite offensive to the reader.

The rules are many and could appear to be overwhelming. But, if you can master a few, you will be in better standing than those who ignore the lot. After all, sometimes having good manners simply means “putting up with other people's bad manners.” - H. Jackson Browne

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