

CHARACTER



Courtesy

October 2005

Courtesy is defined as “polite behavior; gracious manner or manners.” It is thoughtfulness towards others.

“Courtesy is a man’s privilege, not an obligation.”

(Anonymous)

While visiting a foreign country my Dad had the following experience. Each morning as he left his hotel to walk to his place of business he encountered a huge pile of dirt on the sidewalk. It was so big that he had to walk into a crowded and dangerous street to go around it. After several days of this, he finally inquired as to why it was there. He found out that it had been sitting there for 3 years and no one knew why it was put there in the first place! Furthermore, nobody had moved it because no one thought it was their responsibility!

Abraham Lincoln said, “Die when I may, I want it said of me, by those who know me best, that I always plucked a thistle and planted a flower when I thought a flower would grow.”

I love the idea that the pile of dirt could represent a lack of courtesy, incivility or just plain meanness. Likewise, planting a flower is a great metaphor for courtesy and kindness.

To witness a lack of courtesy in our society all we have to do is get in our car, go to a retail establishment or restaurant, visit an airport or walk down the street. And don’t even get me started about cell phones!

In a recent essay titled “Common Courtesy”, the author stated the following:

“On a normal day I encounter at least 100 people. These people do not have to be people that I talk to, just merely someone that I look directly in the eye. Of these one hundred individuals, only 20% looked at me and smiled and said hi.”

I suspect that many of us encounter a similar number of people on a daily basis. Do we leave a “pile of dirt” behind us after these encounters or do we “plant a flower?”

May I suggest that it is not difficult to “plant a flower” in our daily encounters with others. The simple act of smiling can be very powerful.

We tell our children that, “Please and Thank You are the magic words”, yet these “magical” words have almost disappeared from the American vocabulary.

I can’t think of too many people who get “piles of dirt” as often as those who work in the service industries: retail, airline, restaurant and cleaning services to name a few. So many times while people use these services, they abuse those who provide them. How many times have we witnessed the poor clerk or waitress being yelled at for something they have no control over?

As a teenager I worked at a large department store. One day a man came in with a problem with some of our merchandise. He was obviously frustrated and took it out on me! He wasn’t just rude, he got personal. I was crushed. When he finally left, the customer who had been standing behind him said, “I am so sorry he treated you that way, you certainly didn’t deserve it!” In essence, he planted a flower in someone else’s pile of dirt!

The recent tragedy along the gulf coast has really brought out the best and the worst in people. A striking scenario that was played out over and over again, was that after basic needs like food, water and sanitation were met, people just needed to be hugged and to know that someone cared.

Most of us in our community have the basic needs of life. I think we could agree that all of us want to be liked, respected and treated courteously. It all boils down to the Golden Rule: “Don’t leave a pile of dirt, because you probably wouldn’t like to get one.” Or in other words, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

Let’s make Lindon “A Little Bit of Country” with a whole lot of Courtesy.

*Jennifer Kleinman
Lindon Resident*

“Nothing is ever lost by courtesy. It is the cheapest of the pleasures; costs nothing and conveys much. It pleases him who gives and him who receives; and thus, like mercy, it is twice blessed.”

–*Erastus Wiman*

“Really big people are, above everything else, courteous, considerate and generous - not just to some people in some circumstances - but to everyone all the time.”

–*Thomas J. Watson*

“Gratitude is the most exquisite form of courtesy.”

–*Jacques Maritain*

Book List

What Do You Say, Dear?

by Maurice Sendak

What Do You Do, Dear? Proper Conduct for all Occasions

by Sesyle Joslin

Mind Your Manners!

by Peggy Parish

You Know Better Than That!

by Smaridge, Norah, Nashville, Abington Press, 1973

Family Activities

–One of the most productive inventors, **George Westinghouse** was born on October 6, 1846. His inventions included the railroad train airbrake, alternating current electrical power transmission, and the gas meter. He organized over 50 companies. He initiated a half-day off on Saturday for his employees, pension fund for workers, and paid vacations. It is said that his “religion was simple: The Golden Rule.”

What relationship does courtesy have to the Golden Rule? – Discuss “magic” words like “thank you,” “Please” and “excuse me.” Whenever someone uses one, act like you’re under their spell and quickly compliment and grant all polite requests, as long as they’re reasonable.

-Have a dress-up party. Serve punch and cookies. Ask children to invite their favorite stuffed animals. Then, try to outdo each other’s politeness.

-Teach children to say (and write), “Thank you” even for gifts they don’t love. Pretend to give them unusual presents, then ask them to practice saying, “Thank you.”

Kid’s Corner

Courtesy is thoughtfulness towards others. If you use courtesy you will gather love. He who uses courtesy will make friends. If somebody does a good job, you can tell them so, that is what courtesy is. This is what makes other people feel good.

Gentry Merideth

We, at Character Connection would like to focus on helping parents access character materials this year by using the web site located at www.lindoncharacterconnection.com. If you are interested in receiving a monthly reminder of the character traits and access to resource materials, please e-mail your address to arlainea@isquaredinc.com

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