

Whatever happened to RESPECT

by Claudia A. Monte

Respect is a word for all ages, all people and all situations. It was once a commonplace word but is it now a word that people wish they would hear more often. It is a wake-up call for all of us when we see signs in stores that serve as reminders for store employees to *smile* and say *thank you*. It used to come naturally. Where did it go? How do we get it back?

In my travels as a consultant and trainer, I meet hundreds of people throughout the year. Universally, when asked about the most important qualities needed for successful personal and professional relationships, people respond with the same two words: “respect” and “communication.” Respect is fundamental. When consideration for another is shown, communication flows. As conversations develop, relationships form. The resulting dynamics lead to teamwork and support for another. Organizationally, the outcome is success. If showing respect and courtesy are integral for success, why aren’t we seeing more of it? Is it easier to blame it on the times being hectic or do we stand up and take responsibility for it ourselves? It is time to raise the bar on courtesy and civility. Even though we balance many demands today, it doesn’t take a lot of time or effort to smile, show appreciation or say *thanks*. In the midst of all of life’s craziness, what do you most remember? It may be the time your supervisor, coworker, neighbor, associate or client said *thank you*. Or the request that started with *please*. Or when somebody said *sorry* with sincerity. Or the time a stranger smiled when you were having a bad day and then it didn’t seem so bad after all.

I will never forget the moment when a participant in one of my classes pulled out a well-worn letter from her briefcase. It was from her supervisor thanking her for extra effort on the job. She carried it with her and was proud to share it. It meant a lot to her. It didn’t take a lot of time or cost a lot of money to write that letter, however, the return was enormous.

The standards of courtesy that apply to the treatment of others in our homes should also apply in our places of employment. A pleasant *hello* or *good morning* can set the tone for the rest of the day. If we wouldn’t be rude to guests

in our homes, then why act that way at work? Those of us who work full time outside the home spend more of our waking hours with our co-workers than we do with our friends. Shouldn’t we make it a more pleasant and productive atmosphere for everyone?

The way in which we talk to people has a direct result on the success of our relationships with them. Presentation is everything in the communication process. Choice of words, tone of voice, eye contact and other forms of body language contribute to the total message. Communication is a powerful tool. It is our choice to use it positively or negatively.

Positive reinforcement tends to foster positive behavior. An environment that values its employees, solicits input, provides recognition, establishes clear job expectations and gives constructive feedback — in other words, shows respect for employees — is high on the motivation scale. Several years ago in a survey of 25,000 people conducted by the Wilson Learning Corporation, 69 percent of the respondents stated that a worker’s relationship with his or her immediate supervisor was critical to job satisfaction. When that relationship breaks down, morale lowers, absenteeism increases, teamwork falters and productivity diminishes.

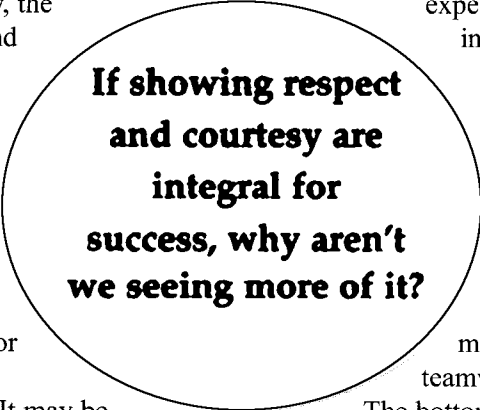
The bottom line is directly impacted. People are the most valuable resource for any organization. In fact they are the organization. It helps to say hello, to know their names, to say thank you. That’s respect.

In our lifetimes we will meet many types of people all with their own unique personalities. Some we will like and others will be more . . . *challenging*.

In our “*Dealing With Difficult People*” seminars, participants learn how to handle the Snipers, Tanks, Clams, Exploders, Complainers and other challenging characters in their lives. One thing all those “difficult people” have in common is their lack of respect for others and the worst thing is that their disrespect can be contagious.

Luckily, respect can also be contagious. One of the most important messages of our “Difficult People” seminars is this:

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You can't actually change other people, but you can change yourself — and as a result, you can affect others' behavior toward you.

The process we teach our seminar participants is: (1) How to determine and apply the appropriate strategy for dealing with whatever type difficult person is making you crazy (respecting the *person* while working to change the objectionable *behavior*) and (2) How to maintain your own self-respect and not allow yourself to sink to the behavior level of the difficult, disrespectful person. Respect starts from within and it's contagious. Respect yourself and others and expect them to respect you. Otherwise we know all too well what the result will be — we'll see you in the next class.

Speaking of the contagiousness of respect, Pat Guerriero, Mayor of Melrose, Massachusetts, recently formed a "Responding with Respect" committee to promote courtesy and respect among people in the community. As part of this initiative, he asked the people of his town to practice a week of civility and politeness with the hope of creating a sense of fellowship that would endure. Among the benefits cited in the news report were increased parent volunteerism, improved civic engagement, special interfaith activities, a city government open house, the highest-ever contributions to the city's "Gift of Hope" charity fund and an atmosphere of respect and civility during debates at City Hall.

It is time for each of us to make the cycle of respect real again. In spite of all the technology available to us today sometimes the basics are still the best.

A smile doesn't take a lot of effort.

A sorry indicates strength of character, not weakness.

A thanks goes a long way.

Please invites cooperation.

A letter of recognition or appreciation is valuable.

We learn what we live. We learn from one another. Hopefully, we can re-learn how to respect one another. Let the cycle begin anew. Remember the adage — *treat others the way you want to be treated*. The thought has been around for a long time, but it still says it all. @

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Claudia A. Monte is president of CAM Consulting Services, a training and consulting firm which specializes in professional development and organizational growth. Ms. Monte presented the dynamic "Dealing With Difficult People" seminar at the 1998 Region 2 Annual Meeting in Philadelphia, receiving universally enthusiastic evaluations from participants. She may be contacted at P.O. Box 469, Crosswicks, NJ 08515 (609.291.1937).