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The Politeness Pundit

By Susan Dunn

The Politeness Pundit by Susan Dunn, MA, Emotional Intelligence Coach

If you're actually reading this article, you may be one of those closet politeness pundits yourself. Here, I'll save you from having to look it up. It's from the Sanskrit (pandita) and means " a learned man" (while I am female) or "one who gives opinions in an authoritative manner."

Is that you? If so, huzzah, you've found a fellow champion (and I, you)!

Do you walk around shaking your head these days, wondering why it all has to be so nasty? Do you listen to someone cop an attitude to someone else (beyond the age of, say, 18, where copping an attitude is expected) and have that `nails on a blackboard' feeling? Do you watch someone go after someone else at work in a perfectly awful way, seemingly just for the sport of it, and shudder? Do you wonder where the politeness has gone? And why?

If so, you may wonder, as I do, what their childhood was like that they failed to rise above the stuff of childhood. Now, I'll admit I had the perfect childhood for exploring my own nastiness and the limitations of the rewards of same. I had a twin sister (as well as other siblings). Twins spend an inordinate amount of time together. It's the ultimate test: get along or die.

We fought like cats and dogs. Mother would banish us to separate rooms and we'd cry to get back together again (so she said). What's a mother to do? Eventually she gave up, smart woman that she was, and let us sort it out.

What was I to do? My twin took my necklace, slopped her things all over my side of the room, took MY Snicker's bar, occasionally lost her temper and said nasty things to me, and sometimes (when Mother wasn't looking, which was most of the time) even slapped me around a bit. And she was always there! That's the thing: it doesn't go away.

On the other hand, I never had to start school alone. I could take her Snicker's bar, as well as borrow her necklace. I never had to wake up alone in the night. And we could gang up on someone who was nasty to one of us.

I can't say I "struggled" with this; it was just a fact of life, and in some muddled child-y sort of way, I figured out the good outweighed the bad, and that I'd just have to figure out something.

It was helped by an act of fate: my father's latest promotion landed us in a new high school of 4,000, not knowing anyone but each other. I think we both decided it might be smart to get along with one another.

While we weren't that crazy about one another at that point, we were all we had. And there's a sense in which that's true of all of us, no?

There in that office where you work is this little group of people you're stuck with all day long, like it or

not. So why not get along? Would it be so difficult? No, it would not, and it brings nice results. If you're the egocentric type - it helps your health. If you're another type - you've learned by now, I'm sure, that sugar works better than vinegar, or however that saying goes.

I'm struck with the irrelevant things people blame their nastiness on - I can't stand my manager, they don't know how to do things around here, she gets on my nerves, they don't appreciate me ... and then the I have a headache, backache, teenager at home, PMS. Who doesn't? That's an excuse, not a reason.

It isn't all about you. And check out your premises. Who said you have to like someone to get along with them? Who says you have to be feeling good to behave in a civilized manner?

It's the same with marriage - barring true pathology on the party of the first part, or the second, you're going to encounter the same set of bowling pins at the end of every bowling alley. Things are not, nor will they ever be, arranged for your sole satisfaction.

Because we live and work together, we have etiquette (or used to): the rules of how to behave in public. It may be experiencing a comeback. Some of us would be relieved to see more of it.

OFFICE SCENARIOS

·Pollyanna walks through the usual stress-filled office with a big smile on her face and Scrooge says, "Why are you smiling? Are you on drugs or something?" POLITENESS POINT: If you're so unhappy you must stamp out all signs of it in others, get therapy.

·Mario turns a corner and runs into someone who snarls at him. POLITENESS POINT: Since when did we stop walking (as we drive) on the right side (not the 'correct' side, the right-as-opposed-to-left side) of the hallway? The rules are what make orderly life possible. You see how many squabbles could be prevented if we did something like this?

·People walk in without greeting one another, which not only makes it impossible for the phone receptionist to know who's there, but puts a surly tone to it all. POLITENESS POINT: Didn't your mother instruct you to say "Good morning. Did you sleep well?" when you came to the breakfast table? COROLLARY: Whether you meant it or not. That's sort of the point.

·Flick hands Flack a phone message, who takes it, grunts, turns oh his heel and walks off.

POLITENESS POINT: What happened to "Thank you" and "You're welcome."

·Curly, Larry and Moe head out to lunch, not inviting the 4th member of the department to join them, for whatever reason, and saying nothing. POLITENESS POINT: "We're going to have lunch to talk about our part of the project. I know you've had enough of it, so you don't have to come."

·Playing the game of "let's get the new person." POLITENESS POINT: Frat hazing is for frat boys. Grow up.

·Someone comes from another culture/dresses weird/is known to be a stamp collector/takes punctuation a little too seriously so let's mob up on them and make their life miserable. POLITENESS POINT: Very astute, Sherlock, that they're different, but if you need to make someone else feel small in order to make yourself feel big, get therapy.

·Mary's bored so she starts a rumor about Harry. POLITENESS POINT: Isn't there some work you're supposed to be doing?

·You're the boss, it's your shop, you fought and scrambled to get there, so now you've earned the right to act like a petulant two-year-old. POLITENESS POINT: Life is long. What goes around comes around. COROLLARY: Do you have any idea what you look like when you're acting that way?

·When you were climbing up the ladder Attila the Hun was nasty to you, so now it's your turn.

POLITENESS POINT: Instead of "turn about is fair play," how about getting your knuckles off the ground and treating people the way you wish you'd been treated and weren't? In addition to giving you a delicious sense of righteousness, it could also save your health, not to mention that of those around you.

·You can't control yourself because you're under too much stress/have more to do than everyone else/produce the most/are special. POLITENESS POINT: Give me a break.

· You don't like something about someone so you're rude. POLITENESS POINT: If you aren't past the point of logic and reason, did you ever consider they probably don't like something about you as well, so that's not a reason!

WHAT IS POLITENESS?

Etiquette and good manners sort of level the playing field in your head. It means how you act regardless of whom you're with. Therefore it shows more about you than about the other, i.e., Dave Barry's quote that someone who's nice to you, but not nice to the water, is not a nice person.

And BTW, the point of being nice isn't to be popular; it's about smoothing out daily interactions. Etiquette eliminates a lot of the friction that drives us all nuts. We can all be little beasties. That's why dinner manner developed ... there we all are with sharp instruments in our hands.

SOME ETIQUETTE TIPS:

- 1.If you haven't figured out yet that you have a choice how you feel, act and think, and that they affect your health, do some reading, get some coaching, get enlightened.
- 2.Your Emotional Intelligence, your ability to manage yourself and your relationships (of all kinds), affects your success, happiness, and health.
- 3.Learn where the silverware goes. One reason people are nasty is because they feel inferior, and there are books you can read and courses you can take that will get you to a level where you're

comfortable. Here, I can tell you in one sentence something that will help: "Work the silverware from the outside in." (There's more, but not a whole lot more.)

4.Say "please," "thank you," "you're welcome," and "I apologize." (I apologize is great, BTW, because that you can always do, while you may not really "be sorry" in the strictest sense of the term. (Hey, I'm a pundit!)

5.Ask permission. You may intend to take a cell phone call during the lunch one way or another, but politeness dictates you ask ("I'm expecting an important call I must take. Do you mind?"). The beauty is politeness will dictate they respond, "Why no, I don't mind at all." See how it works?

6.Read Emily Post (in its 16th edition). Would it help persuade you to know it's listed on www.navyadvancement.com ?

7.Pay attention to the small things. Walk on the right side, let others in front of you in line when you can afford to (it's good self-discipline), smile, use people's names, pass the salt and pepper, offer to get something or do something for someone else once in a while.

8.Don't put people who use good manners in the penalty box. There's a creeping sentiment these days that someone who says please and thank you is a lightweight.

9.Keep some boundaries. It used to be not everyone wanted to hear about your sex life, religious preference or political persuasion. Nowadays there are 50 additional things not imagined 25 years ago that we don't want to hear about. Save it.

THE PAY OFF

Reduced friction. Less stress.

Studies show repeatedly that money is not the top reason why people stay at jobs. They want an environment of respectfulness, and to feel meaning and purpose in what they do. Etiquette accomplishes both. If you're in a respectful situation, you respect the situation. Get it?

© Susan Dunn, MA, Emotional Intelligence Coach and Consultant, <http://www.susandunn.cc> . Susan is the author of "Why Manners Matter: EQ at Work, at Home, at Play" and other ebooks on important matters. She offers individual coaching in emotional intelligence and etiquette. She also trains and certifies EQ coaches. For FREE EQ ezine, <mailto:sdunn@susandunn.cc> with "ezine" for subject line.

Must Manners be Taught?

By **Jacquie McTaggart**

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PLEASE answer the following questions honestly. (Go ahead - you won't be graded.)

Does your child... Greet you with something other than a grunt in the morning? Use the word "PLEASE" when he asks you to purchase a \$90 pair of designer jeans? Say "THANKS" when you take his forgotten homework assignment to school? Utter "EXCUSE ME" after he accidentally knocks you

down on his way to the phone? Write Grandma a thank-you letter for the DVD she sent in the mail?

Chances are pretty good that a few of you answered, "yes" to some of these questions. Chances are even better that many of you answered, "no" to most of them.

During my lengthy career (forty-two years) in the classroom I observed a drastic decline in what we call "Good Manners." I have no answers (or theories) as to why this has occurred, but it has. I believe that we must make an attempt to correct the situation.

Good manners are the cornerstone of courteous behavior. They provide the impetus to say the words and exhibit the behaviors that distinguish us humans from the rest of the animal kingdom. Good manners show consideration for others.

Good manners demand that intentional sounds of physical relief such as belching and "fluffing" are saved for non-public areas. (You male readers may call "fluffing" by another name, but I'm sure you get the idea.) Good manners encompass all the things that make the people around us feel good. They compel us to eliminate words, sounds, and actions that cause others in our presence to feel uncomfortable. In essence, they enable us to be an accepted member of a civilized society.

Good manners are not automatically caught, they must be taught. A child or adolescent does not magically discover on his own the fact that common decency and politeness help to make him a more socially acceptable person. Neither does he understand that those attributes will ultimately contribute to his success, and help to make him a happier individual. It's up to us to teach our children these concepts.

How do we do that? Good manners, like most values, must be demonstrated and lived in the home if they are to become a permanent part of the child's character. The school should not be expected to bear the primary responsibility for teaching good manners. Seven hours a day for nine months of the year is not an adequate amount of time to instill a lasting principle or a moral value. (In one year, the average kid spends 1,253 hours in school and 7,507 hours out of school.) Teachers can force compliance ("Tell Jimmy you're sorry"), but they can't make good manners and common decency an automatic, knee-jerk response. Parents can.

How? Parents need to demonstrate good manners in the home - day in and day out. Kids hear messages that are delivered by lecture - "You should..." They internalize that which they observe. Parents must "practice what they preach," if they want the value of good manners to become a part of

the child's moral fiber. And they should begin this process when the child is very young.

Politeness and good manners open the door to a successful and happy adult life. We need to give our kids the legs that will enable them to walk through that door.

"Life is not so short but that there is always time enough for courtesy."
– Ralph Waldo Emerson

Jacque McTaggart is a recently retired 42-year career teacher and author of, "From the Teacher's Desk." She currently travels throughout the country speaking at teacher conferences and symposiums for parents. You can find more of her teaching and parenting tips at



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