

Our country is having an epidemic of bad manners, causing all sorts of discord. In Western Civilization, good manners are the grease that makes the social wheels spin. One of our oldest definitions of good manners is the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you," or in the Hebrew scriptures, "Do not do unto others what would be hateful to you." This simple formula works for most of us, with the exception of sociopaths or psychopaths, who do not feel the pain of their victims (no empathy).

Another definition of good manners comes from the Edwardian British: "Do what you want, but don't do it in the street and frighten the horses." Not too bad.

Every culture has its own code of behavior, systems taught from childhood. The rule throughout history has been that the most powerful class has a code of politeness with each other, but these manners do not apply to their dealings with lower classes. Merchants have long had behavior codes among themselves (honor to each other but not necessarily to their customers).

Males have always demanded courtesy from women, who, being physically weaker and dependent, always had to defer. Only in Western Civilization did a code emerge (Medieval Chivalry) about how "gentlemen" should treat "ladies." Again, this was class based.

The Japanese Samuri code demanded great courtesy from their underlings, the violation of which could get the offender instant decapitation. Japanese women were obliged to use a separate, very polite language when addressing men. If a man wanted the window open, he would say: "Open the window." If a woman were to say it, she would say: "If it is not too much trouble, could you please open the window?"

Americans have been accused by those with ancient systems of courtesy to be rude. I believe the contrary: we, Australians, New Zealanders, and Canadians are probably the most courteous people in the world---polite, not out of fear, but because it is right. In an egalitarian society, we pretty much treat each other with courtesy and politeness. We smile a lot, say good morning to strangers, and in general are very civil because we are decent. However, there has always been an underbelly of incivility toward slaves and immigrants.

A polite person would never call a person "Nigger" or "Kike" or "Spic" or "Slant." We do not use such language because we would not like it used against us (Golden Rule). Political arguments should not involve insulting language. For two centuries, Senators and representatives (after they gave up honor dueling) addressed each other as "The Honorable\205., ,," even when vigorously disagreeing with the other\222s viewpoint. People with good manners would not say "You Lie!" during the State of the Nation address.

People with good manners do not lynch, beat, swear at, or disparage others. They do not go into a church and shoot down parishioners. And they do not grope women. All of these offenses are offenses against the natural good manners of most Americans. Offenders should be punished as enemies of a decent society.

"Telling it as it is" is a cover for rudeness. Just because a person thinks dark thoughts does not mean that acting on them is a good thing. This should be the teaching in every household with children. Treat the children with courtesy and insist that they do the same. That is parenting.

The problem with the rudeness epidemic today is that it could become the new norm, and that would make for a very bad society indeed. If one is a true believer in a religion (an ideology), manners would dictate that one does not kill in the name of that ideology, lest they and their fellow believers be subject to the same behavior.

We demonstrate our belief in good manners and empathy when we face a national or international disaster, and our people rally to help. This is the Golden Rule exemplified. We are a community, and should remember to act like one. More unites us than divides us.

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