

Chapter 14

Do Manners Really Say Something about You?

Yesterday I walked into a huge department store to buy an American flag. It was Veterans' Day, and I wanted to hang a flag in front of our house in honor of my grandfather, who was a real patriot and died recently. Papa Allen fought in World War II and received a Purple Heart Medal since he was wounded in action. Veterans' Day was always a special day for him.

Walking through aisle after aisle I finally decided to ask for help. I had no idea where the flags were. It was early in the morning. Employees bustled around their departments, and very few customers were in the store yet. I approached a man at his counter and asked him if he could give me some help. "Yes, um hum, I can," he said, but he never looked at me. He didn't even turn his head for a fraction of a second. I was puzzled. It was as if I weren't even there, as if he were talking to someone else. So, I stood there for a moment. "Go ahead," he said, "I'm listening." He still didn't look at me, but was fiddling with some papers. "Do you usually look at people when they talk to you?" I asked, surprised at myself for saying it. "I'm just doing something else," he said.

What do you think about manners? How would you feel if someone never looked at you while you were talking? Do you think that manners say something about a person? There is an old saying that *manners make the person*. This simply means that manners, the way you behave, determine how the



rest of the world is going to look at you.

When you think about manners, you may think about young people, like yourself, being asked to be polite to adults. That's part of it, but it's only a small piece of the whole picture. On the news recently, a reporter was interviewing two managers from two separate organizations. They both had the same problem. Their employees, although well-trained, had terrible manners. Employees were rude to their bosses, and made hurtful comments about their colleagues to try to get a laugh. People were calling "Hey! Hey!" across the office to get someone's attention. They dressed casually, chomped on bubble gum and told distasteful jokes. The employers wanted help: *How do we deal with the bad manners of our workers?*

What Are Manners?

You might be a little surprised if you were flicking through the channels, while watching TV, if you came upon a news clip of the Russian Parliament in session. Often the representatives scream and yell insulting names at each other. They have even been known to physically attack each other. When they don't agree they sometimes show it through verbal and physical abuse—right there, on camera, in front of the world! Clearly, some of these people have very poor manners!

Would you be surprised to go into the U.S. Congress and see your senators and representatives throwing shoes at each other, fist fighting and calling each other obscene names? Hopefully, you would. These people represent all of the people of the United States and are expected to have decent manners and behave professionally. Even though the issues they discuss mean a lot to them, and they often butt heads, they still follow a basic code of conduct towards one another (most of the time). Do you think that we all should follow a basic system of manners?

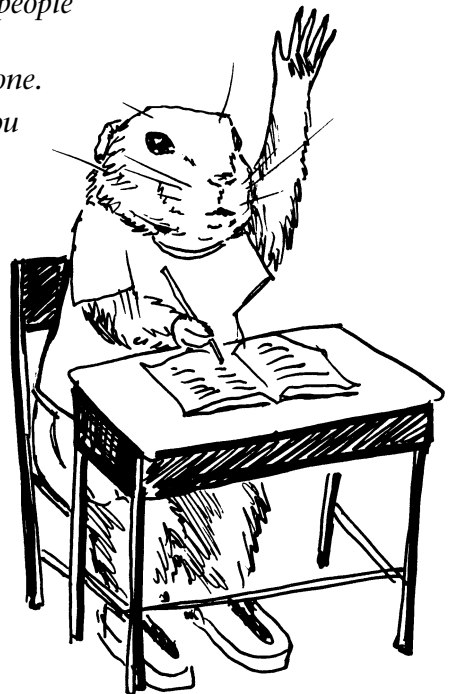
Some manners are cultural, and some are universal. That means that in some countries people may behave slightly differently depending on their culture, but some behaviors are considered polite (or rude) no matter where you go. For instance, you may be surprised to learn that in some countries it is not considered rude to slurp your soup while you are eating. In fact, it expresses great satisfaction with the soup. Likewise, in other countries it is perfectly acceptable to pass gas in public. In other places it is considered rude to pass someone an object using only one

hand, and a sign of respect to pass it using both of your hands. In some countries, you don't shake hands with the same hand you use to wipe your bottom. It sounds funny, but it is important to know these things when you travel. Can you think of some manners that apply to us here in the United States?

- ☉ *Waiting your turn in line and not cutting in front of someone.*
- ☉ *Moving aside if someone is running down the street in a great hurry.*
- ☉ *Not knocking over people who are in your way.*
- ☉ *Greeting people you know when you see them.*
- ☉ *Not screaming at someone when you are feeling agitated or impatient.*
- ☉ *Not screaming and yelling bad language from your car window at another driver.*
- ☉ *Not making rude noises to females you pass on the street.*
- ☉ *Covering your mouth when you sneeze and cough.*
- ☉ *Holding the door open for the person walking in behind you.*
- ☉ *Not shouting for a person but rather going to him to tell him what you need.*
- ☉ *Not spitting in the street when other people are near you.*
- ☉ *Not laughing or making fun of someone.*
- ☉ *Not splashing mud on someone as you ride past them on your bike.*
- ☉ *Waiting your turn to speak.*
- ☉ *Saying 'please' and 'thank you.'*

You can surely think of half a dozen more items to add to the list.

A person's actions show whether he is polite or rude. Politeness is the way in which you show respect for other people, whether you actually like them or not. When you are impolite or rude you show that you do not respect a person. If that person feels offended and gets upset, you shouldn't be surprised! Simple manners go a long way,



and help you establish good relationships with the people all around you.

Name Calling

Hey dufus, four eyes, brain, rat face, dodo, idiot ... come over here! How would you feel if someone called you like that, using any one of those unsavory names? Why are almost all nicknames offensive? It hurts when someone calls you by some made-up nickname, even when they are *just kidding*. Most nicknames make fun of a trait, and it hurts to be made fun of, even if you are too proud to admit it. So, why do people do it?

People who call other people names, and go to great trouble to think of creative ways of insulting others, usually don't feel good about themselves. It is easy to put someone else down when you are feeling low yourself. It's a phony way of trying to show that

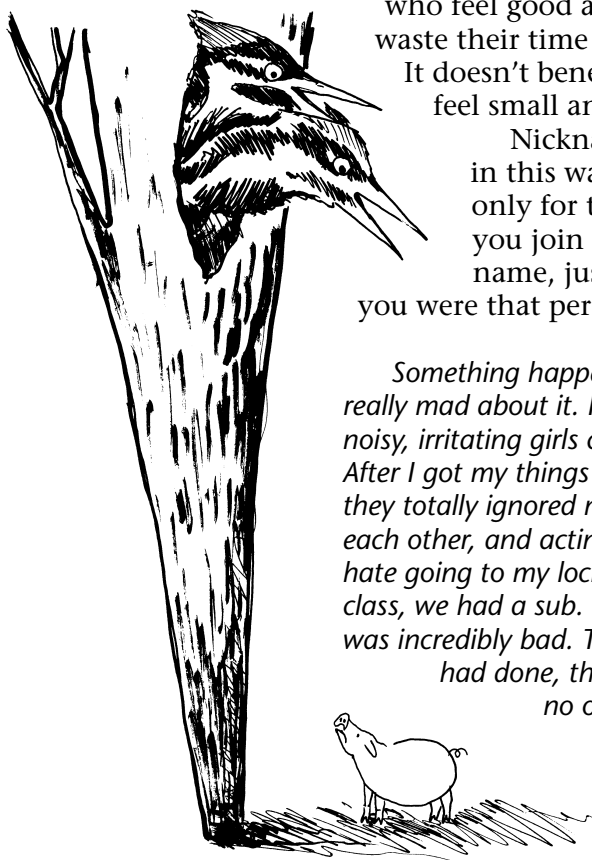
you are better than the other person. People who feel good about themselves don't need to waste their time saying hurtful things to others.

It doesn't benefit them to make someone else feel small and self-conscious.

Nicknames hurt. Picking on someone in this way is rude and cruel, and a game only for the weak and insecure. Before you join in calling someone a hurtful name, just think how you would feel if you were that person.

Something happened at school today, and I'm still really mad about it. I was at my locker when this group of noisy, irritating girls crowded me in and started talking. After I got my things I tried to get through the crowd, but they totally ignored me. They were screaming names at each other, and acting like jerks. Finally, I got away. I hate going to my locker. Then I went into my English class, we had a sub. Mrs. Wilson was out sick. The class was incredibly bad. They lied to her about what work we had done, they were yapping the whole time, and no one did anything. The sub looked like

she was about to cry by the end of the class. Why are people so rude? Sometimes I hate going to school,



I can count on someone smashing into me in the halls, yelling in my ear, or acting stupid in class for a laugh. Why can't we just act normal? It doesn't take much effort and it makes life a lot easier.

Anna, 14

The Code of Honor: Being Polite

When I was growing up my father's mother talked to me about being a lady. My grandmother told me that a lady never says anything that hurts another person. I was about 15 when she told me that, and I thought it was old fashioned. As I have grown older I have thought about what she said, though. I think that she meant that a lady has excellent manners, and that she is careful about what she says, and how she says it. I don't think that she meant it was wrong to speak your mind; she speaks her mind. Later she told me, "There are very few real ladies left in this world, and I hope that you will always be one of them." I think that the same applies to men, as well. Having good manners is the same for men and women. I think it's not so much what you say but rather how you say it.

Is there a difference between being a lady or a gentleman? Clearly there are some differences between males and females, but when it comes down to it, good manners are good manners. Maybe you have read books about the knights and ladies of the olden days. Why do you think that being a knight was such a big deal? At that time, many barbaric groups of fighters existed. They were cruel and took advantage of weaker people. Any means to their end was acceptable. They would often sack entire villages and murder, kidnap and rape the inhabitants. So, the concept of a warrior who had honor and behaved according to a code was truly revolutionary. Do you think that concept of behaving honorably still exists? Let's take a look at some of the requirements for a knight:

- ☞ *Noble and respectful in word and deed.*
- ☞ *Not haughty with the humble nor humble with the haughty.*
- ☞ *Respects women and elderly people.*
- ☞ *Always keeps his word.*
- ☞ *Never fights with a weaker or unarmed enemy.*

Times have changed. Or have they? What do you think? Is there any need for knightly behavior in this modern day? Can you make up a code of behavior for a modern knight? How do these

guidelines apply to girls? In those days women had a different role. Do you think there are any differences between what is expected of a young man and a young woman?

Do Manners Really Say Something about You?

Do manners really say something about you? We think so. We think your manners are like the clothes of your personality. Everyone can see your manners. If you have a reputation for being rude and bad mannered you will not be welcomed in many places. Where do manners matter? They matter at home, in school, at a friend's house, at a party, at a sports event and in public in general. Your manners really are an important part of your character. They show other people how you feel about them, and how you feel about yourself.



Journal

Think to yourself for a minute about all the people you know. Who would you say is the most polite? What makes this person polite? How does this person behave? Does this person have any qualities that you would like to have?



To Do

1. Make a *Being Polite List* and see how many more examples of polite behavior you can come up with. Share your list with your classmates and discuss how being polite makes a big difference to you and your relationships with other people.
2. Imagine that you and your classmates live in the Middle Ages (for instance, in France, in the times of the musketeers). Now imagine you are going to leave the Middle Ages in a time machine to visit your school. Write out your Code of Honor before departing to modern-day America. Now, for one day try to follow your code strictly and see how much fun it is to act nobly even in the modern world! Share your experiences with your classmates.
3. Make a poster that shows the results of being polite to others. How do your actions help other people to feel better themselves? Hang your posters in your classroom when you have finished creating them.

Key Ideas

- ☞ You can be polite even when you are surrounded by people who are acting rudely.
- ☞ Manners are a key part of who you are.



**Politeness costs nothing
and gains everything.**

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu

