

COMMON COURTESY – A HUGE BUSINESS VALUE

In this high-tech, fast-paced business world, it seems people don't always find the time for old-fashioned courteous behaviour. Yet, being courteous can speak volumes about your business values and priorities and set you apart from other individuals and businesses.

At times I think we need to be reminded of some of those basic lessons we learned about courtesy as a child and relate them to doing business with our clients, suppliers and other contacts we make.

Here are a few courteous activities that can leave a lasting impression of yourself and your business....

Follow-through with what you say you were going to do – when you meet someone at a networking meeting and say you will send them some information, or provide them with some contact names – do it! Now, even more than ever with email, there is no excuse not to send information to people in a timely manner.

If you know you can't follow-through by a certain deadline dates, let people know- – *“Due to my schedule, I won't be able to get that information to you until – give them the date. Does this work for you?”* People are quite accommodating if you tell them up-front. It's better they know, instead of disappointing them, as they are waiting for something that is delayed or doesn't materialize.

Let people know you are thinking of them – this is especially important with your clients. Whether you send an article or meeting notice to someone you think may be interested, or a birthday card, or a simple hello note, people remember this. For new people or prospective clients you just meet, send them a little follow-up note that it was nice meeting them. This is a nice courteous gesture and way to keep in touch with clients and prospects. Remember a handwritten note sometimes has more impact than an email, because it shows that you have taken the extra time for a personal touch.

Return phone calls or make sure someone from your organization does. This includes calls from people even wanting to sell you something – you never know why they may be calling. Not returning calls can reflect on your business practices and standards and leave a bad impression. Think of the times when calls you made weren't returned – how do you feel? Returning calls puts your company in a favorable light.

Be personable and honest when meeting people. Smile, look them in the eye, give them a warm handshake and give the individual your full attention at that moment. I'm sure many of you have experienced a person you may have met at a networking event and while you are talking to them, they are looking around the room, waving at people, checking their watch, etc. Just giving people you met some of your time and being mindful is both courteous and powerful!

Remember names. It shows you have listened, you're aware and at times flattering. Use their name when you talk to them, it holds their attention. If you're not good at

remembering names, check out some excellent books on "Memory Improvement" in the library. Another tip is to say the person's name aloud when you first meet them, or repeat it in your head.

Treat people with respect and courtesy no matter who they are. A person's status in life should have no impact on how you interact with people. As the saying goes, whatever you want out of life, you need to give to others first. If you want to be treated with respect and courtesy, treat others that way in your dealings.

Think of something nice to say or do, or as Oprey Winfrey would suggest, "initiate random acts of kindness", it will make the world a better place. So often in life we are quick to talk negatively about an experience, a person or an act, but we seldom acknowledge positive acts or experiences. We need to do more for others, and some of it could be as simple as saying, "I've really enjoyed talking with you today", and see how good it makes you feel and how people respond. A kind word can make their day.

Say Thank You. It's amazing how few people invest the time to express their gratitude for a favor or job well done. Saying thank you is courteous, same with sending a "thank you" card where appropriate. Remember people don't have to do anything for you that they don't choose to. Those two words of "thank you" can go a long way!

Be an attentive listener when you are engaging in conversation. Listen to what the other person is saying, don't always try to jump in and add to it. Make sure you have heard what they have said. Listening is one of the most overlooked communication skills, and as a business owner, listening is one of the most valuable tools and one that can make a huge difference in determining clients' needs. A well-known saying goes "*Listen with the intent to understand, not to explain*".

Simple common courtesy does make a difference not just for the recipient, but also to the individual. Remember what you learned as a child on being courteous and discover what an impact it can make on your business!

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