

Civility

Dave Beckman, Unitarian-Universalist Fellowship of La Crosse, WI, March 2012

Candle Lighting and Opening Words:

Definition: What is Civility? “Civility is claiming and caring for one’s identity, needs and beliefs without degrading someone else’s in the process.”...and it begins with us.

Civility is about more than merely being polite, although being polite is an excellent start.

Civility fosters a deep self-awareness, even as it is characterized by true respect for others.

Civility requires extremely hard work of staying present even with those with whom we have deep-rooted and perhaps fierce disagreements. It is about constantly being open to hear, to teach and to change. It seeks common ground as a beginning point for dialogue when differences occur, while at the same time recognizes that differences are enriching. It is patience, grace, and strength of character.

Institute for Civility in Government Co-Founders, Cassandra Dahnke and Thomas Spath.

Check-In: A time for sharing cares or concerns.

Focus: *Why Civility Matters:* Excerpt from March 2012, AARP.org/Bulletin

“Whatever happened to civility?” is oft-heard lament, particularity among those of us over 50 who recognize civility’s increasing absence in a world changing at warp speed. Technology has forever altered the style, speed and reach of our decidedly less personal communication. Escalating vulgarity, lax standards, sensational media and polarized politics reign. Society today is far different than it was when we were young.

While rudeness is pervasive and rising (one recent report concluded that bad behavior may be the “new normal”), the societal and financial costs of incivility are astronomical-impacting our homes and relationships, schools, economy, health care and government.

Civility is more than polite correctness. Derived from the old French and Latin term for “good citizen,” civility enables us to live respectfully in communities; it is the glue that binds our society. It can be the difference between life and death-as, for example, when health care professionals bully subordinates, cover mistakes and create mistrust. It is an essential component of our human sustainability, enabling us not only to survive but thrive.

Reversing the current course of incivility is a challenge for our times. Until a rudeness vaccine is developed, we must dig into our civility tool kit. There are compelling reasons why we should. A life is not defined by a single act, and few of us will ever achieve national acclaim or perform deeds that change the course of history. However, there is “greatness” in treating others with respect, compassion, kindness and generosity. With this we can make a difference in the lives of many.

Sarah Hacala is a certified etiquette and protocol consultant and author of *Saving Civility: 52 Ways to Tame Rude, Crude and Attitude for a Polite Planet* (Skylight Paths to Publishing). For more information, please visit www.savingcivility.com

Questions:

1. Have you ever been treated in an uncivil manner and, if so, what were your feelings and reaction?
2. Have you ever treated someone in an uncivil manner and, if so, what are your feelings today and how would you handle the situation differently?
3. Do you believe civility has declined and, if so, what factors do you believe have contributed to this decline?
4. What impact do you think civility, as it exists today, will have on the future of America? On the future of the World?

Closing Words:

Quotation: "Civility costs nothing and buys everything" [Mary Wortley Montagu *Letter to her daughter*]

Proverb: "A civil question deserves a civil answer"