

HER VIEW: Let's return to a more refined, civil society

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A number of columnists have weighed in about the reasons for the current lack of refinement and civility in our country. I'd like to add a few thoughts of my own to this discussion.

The hippies did society a service by getting rid of some of the phoniness and silliness in social interplay but, in doing so, they destroyed much of the civility and basic good manners that are the oil of a civilized society. In turn, they spawned a generation that was taught few manners, almost nothing about good taste or any of the so-called social graces. Now, too many of their children are coming of age without having learned these skills.

To be fair, I've noticed an improvement in recent years with today's young people. I find them much kinder and much more friendly than even 10 years ago, more politically involved and more sensitive to other people's feelings. They are on the way back. Some have even recognized the need to take lessons in basic table manners, and the fact that this could affect their ability to get the job they might like. How sad they weren't taught at home.

We have gone through a lot of social turmoil because of this lack of manners. I remember Eugene Prince choosing not to run again for the Washington Senate after serving many terms with distinction. His reason was that the spate of new, inexperienced legislators were so lacking in the fundamental civility and the good manners that had existed earlier,

it was no longer a pleasure for him to serve. This boorish behavior was evident in Congress at that time as well.

I remember my teachers saying something about lazy manners being a sign of a lazy mind. I think this a common perception and, whether true or not, it affects how prospective employers view applicants. One may not need refined manners to get a job digging ditches but for some jobs they should be regarded as necessary - certainly those meet the public jobs that reflect on the employer. How pleasant it is to be served by someone with good manners.

Another related aspect of this is the fault of the schools. I've noticed how few young people are skilled in public speaking. They don't know how to project their voices, enunciate words, make eye contact with an audience, pace their speech, organize their thoughts and properly use a microphone. Too often they come across as unprepared, stumbling idiots. All of the ones I've noticed recently are college-educated, some even professors and teachers. Also, too few know the proper way to conduct a formal meeting. Robert's Rules of Order are largely ignored or forgotten - if they were ever learned. This is sad because lack of these skills makes a person seem ineffectual.

The time has come to have public discussion on this subject. We need to set priorities for what is important and what is less important. Then we can discuss ways to return to a more refined, civil society. As I said, the hippies did us some favors when they got rid of some of the phonier aspects of our manners, but they threw the baby out with the bath water. We've got to find that baby, clean her/him up, and set up a plan to teach what has been missed because of our lax, lazy child-rearing so the baby can catch up. Our ancestors did some things right based on lessons learned the hard way. We are not being fair to our offspring if we fail to pass on this learning.

Let's get together and set some new standards of civility and good behavior that are reasonable, useful, and have real meaning. By meeting those criteria, the likelihood of their being perpetuated and valued is greatly increased. We aspire, as a country, to be a world leader. Let's make sure we are worthy of that honor.

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