

THE MANNERLY MANAGER!

by Carolann Philips

Anyone who watches Indian television must have come across an advertisement aired by a company that calls itself India's number one job search site. The advert shows numerous enthusiastic hands doodling and scribbling inane words such as 'acidity', 'anaconda' and 'swine flu' around the nameplate on the door of their not-so-refined, arrogant boss. Discourteous or disrespectful behavior by managers disheartens employees; undermine their confidence and their ability to contribute to the organization. It damages all of the other expensive efforts made by the organization to raise productivity. Peter Drucker, the management guru, emphasized that "Good manners are the lubricating oil of organizations." With this in mind, there is simply no excuse for bad manners. Whether giving feedback, issuing instructions or exerting power; appropriate business etiquette and good manners are an absolute necessity.

At a certain professional level, what differentiates one manager from the other has nothing to do with one's abilities, experience, and training and everything to do with behavior. Business etiquette is the missing link. Here are some etiquette guidelines that successful managers focus on to achieve excellence.

Mannerly managers show staff that they care. They do this by giving them full attention when returning a greeting and that includes eye contact and a courteous smile. When an employee comes into their office, they stop working on the computer and avoid all other

‘multi-tasking’ actions such as filing of papers, signing of documents, opening and closing of drawers and readjusting cell phone settings which divert their attention from what the staff is saying.

There are some tasks where the time of the subordinate may be more valuable than that of the manager. Courteous managers do not call a subordinate to the cabin for a discussion and then keep the employee waiting indefinitely while they attend to phone calls or e-mails. They use discretion and chose to convey simple instructions or information over the telephone rather than summon the employee repeatedly for trivial matters. Mannerly managers refrain from speaking to subordinates over the speaker phone. Using a speaker phone tells the employee that he or she does not deserve the simple action or effort of picking up the phone. Well behaved managers do not disparage other departments, department heads, or the employees of other departments to their subordinates. They do not create an “us against them” mentality.

Mannerly managers do not bully their staff as a way of exerting power. Bullying includes:

- Issuing blanket ultimatums, warnings and threats verbally or via e-mail without justification.
- Demonstrating intimidating behavior such as flying off into a sudden rage over trivial matters.
- Unwarranted ridiculing, or making indirect and sarcastic comments designed to undermine the employee.
- Taking steps to make a subordinate’s work life extremely difficult including setting of impossible deadlines, constantly changing reporting lines, unreasonably

removing areas of responsibility and deliberately blocking advancement without cause.

- Deliberate exclusion of an employee from work related activities in which they have a right or legitimate expectation to participate.
- Handing an employee the ‘silent treatment’, i.e. ignoring the employee by neither speaking nor responding to his or her words.

I agree that these are all relatively trivial things, but nevertheless they have a compound effect that in time will serve as a justification on how long an employee stays in an organization or how productive he or she will be. Whilst business schools cover a gamut of leadership and management skills, none of the skills pertaining to workplace protocol is ever taught. But as Aristotle said, “Virtue has to start somewhere. As far as we know, there is no inherited gene for politeness.” Etiquette must therefore be learnt by doing it.

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Carolann has had the pleasure of delivering programs to a diverse clientele; from major airlines, leading banks, embassies, and reputed business houses to the modeling & fashion industry and royalty within the GCC. She is also a columnist for the ‘Thursday’ magazine, a local publication.