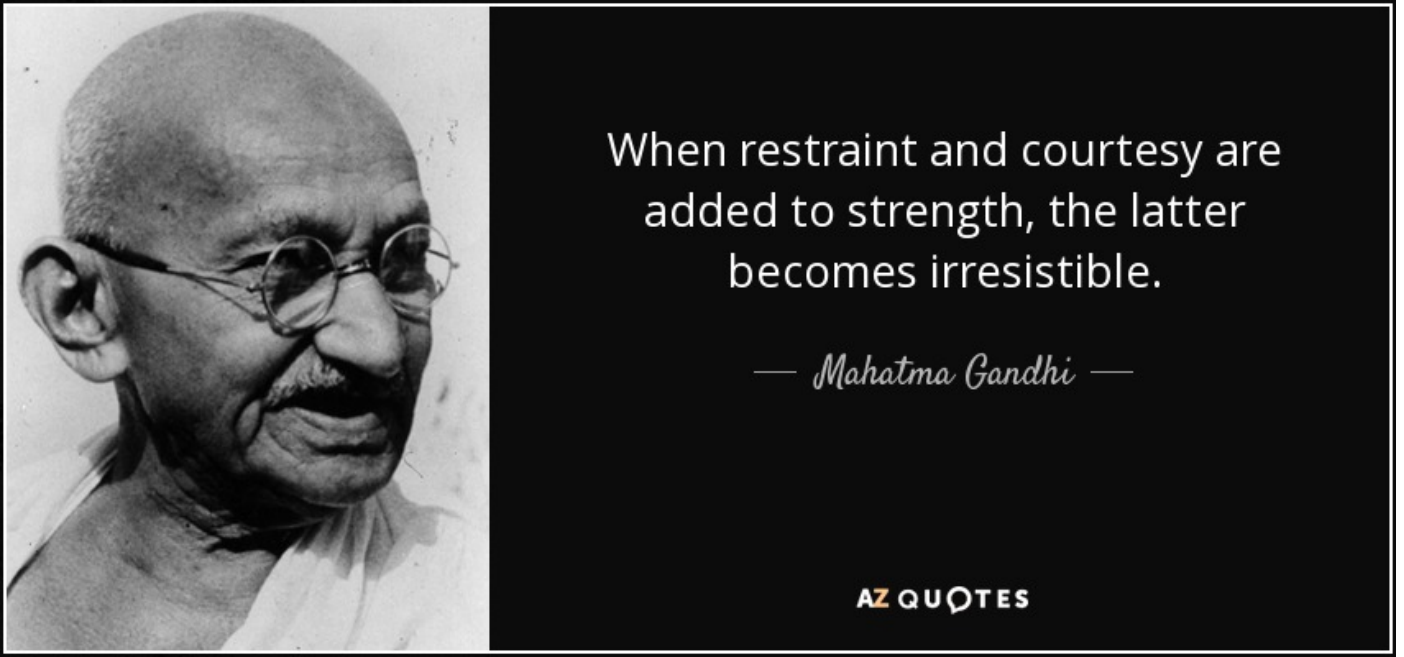


BRIEF 2 - COURTESY



Oxford definition: The showing of politeness in one's attitude and behaviour towards others.

Thesaurus alternatives: politeness, civility, respect, deference, gallantry, good breeding, gentility, kindness, consideration, thoughtfulness, cordiality, geniality, affability, urbanity, polish, refinement, decorousness, tact, discretion.

Clearly many terms can be used for the variety of behaviour being called 'Courtesy'. All are different views of the concept that is the subject of this brief.

The world would not work without courtesy, it is a foundation on which a society is built. The absence of accepted and expected courtesy is immediately noticed and generates resentment. Its absence could indicate many undesirable things, e.g. indifference, ignorance, insult, a lack of responsibility. At an extreme its absence is a driver of social instability.

Courtesy is a learnt behaviour. It is learnt through such means as:

- doing what is seen as right
- what is ordered by some authority
- daily necessity to get things done.
- a growing awareness of how things interconnect that comes with maturity.

The intent (and practice) of courtesy includes the following:

- Gratitude (e.g. 'Thank you')
- Sharing (e.g. 'Please')
- Increase predictability (e.g. Knowing what is meant)
- Indicating the significance of others (e.g. 'Excuse me')
- Obliging individual needs (e.g. surrendering a seat to a pregnant woman)
- Respecting other's rights (e.g. waiting your turn, listening and responding)
- Engaging in cooperative action (e.g. allowing others time to speak as well)
- Accepting differences (e.g. asking questions first)
- Recognition of status (e.g. terms of deference)

- Persuasion (e.g. noticing a person's preferences)
- Negotiating an outcome (e.g. understanding that there are different needs)

Courtesy is much more than some habits that might have become out-dated with time (e.g. a man walking on the road side of a woman) or simply being sweet or charming.

Mastering the principles of courteous behaviour is a basis for applying awareness more broadly, e.g. to unique situations, different cultures, to those with handicaps, and social sub-groupings. Learning how to be courteous shapes the development of an individual's personality (i.e. how others experience them) and also that person's ability to see and understand others. How we are treated and how we treat others plays a big role in our emotional health.

There is an expectation that with increasing age comes increasing mastery of courteous behaviour. We forgive (and correct) the child who forgets to say 'please' or 'thank-you' but we are less likely to extend that forgiveness and acceptance to a young adult.

When courtesy is absent, it is normal for steps to be taken to ensure these that these ways are followed. Typically, this starts with simple reminding and explanation. However, if explanation and patience are not enough, then consequences regularly occur, including, on occasion, punishment.

Such is the importance of courtesy, that the absence of courteous behaviour and attitudes can cause significant resentment amongst those expecting such behaviour and attitudes. That resentment can lead those expecting it to provide harsh feedback or consequences to those who are failing to comply with these common expectations. At best this feedback will cause adjustment issues, at worst it will result in anger and mental health issues.

Because courtesy is learnt, it sometimes means it needs to be formally taught. That is particularly the case when considering situations that have quite specific courtesy requirements:

- when we encounter people who are different to ourselves in terms of generation, age, gender, culture, ability;
- when we are in situations that are highly formalised (e.g. courtrooms, diplomatic, royal courts, prisons, armed services, religious situations, certain workplaces);
- when we are in situations where there is high likelihood of negative consequences for poor behaviour (e.g. driving a vehicle);
- when we are in new situations where we don't fully understand the expectations (e.g. travelling to a new country, relocating to new environment)
- when we are exposed to sub-groups or sub-cultures whose experiences are very different to our own (e.g. motorcycle gangs, academia, prisons, LGBTIQ, the handicapped),
- when trying to build relationships with others (e.g. shouting drinks, balance in conversations, listening, conversation by question rather than statement)

THE CHALLENGE OF THIS BRIEF

With the significance of courtesy in mind, consider situations in which education, guidance, construction or, indeed, enforcement of codes of courteous and cooperative behaviour is required.

- International students arriving from a primarily NESB background.
- School leavers at their first place of employment.
- Joining a new organisation.
- Prisoners on leaving gaol after long sentences.

- Joining a highly hierarchic organization e.g. the police or the armed services
- Leaving a highly hierarchic organization e.g. the police or the armed services
- Participating in debates and discussion forums concerning sensitive matters.
- Dealing with groups with a history of discrimination, e.g. domestic violence, indigenous dispossession, sexual abuse, LGBTIQ communities.
- Dealing with special groups, e.g. those with an intellectual disability.
- Travelling to and holidaying in a different country.
- Being part of a sporting or recreational club.
- As a part of programmes to address matters such as anger or sexual offending.
- Using social media.
- Relocating to a different environment, e.g. rural to urban or vice versa.
- Entering a workplace for the first time or after a long absence.
- Working in highly pressured jobs.
- Educational settings, e.g. the transition between secondary and tertiary education.

Pick one of these groups or situations (or a group/situation of your own selection) and explore the courtesy requirements for that group/situation and then develop a communication strategy to provide instruction on those courtesy requirements.

For example, what should a fresh graduate know about the courtesy requirements of being in their first job? How would you teach them those requirements?

WHERE TO START

1. Start with your own experiences. What have you learned about being courteous in different situations? Perhaps there are people in your life that have made big changes (e.g. gone to live in another country). Ask them what they needed to learn about being courteous in those new situations.
2. Do a search of the literature. Likely search terms include:
 - Civility
 - Organizational civility
 - Psychology and courtesy
 - Psychology and civility
 - Courtesy and social psychology
 - Organizational citizenship behaviour
 - Citizenship behaviour.
3. Have a chat with the psychologist attached to this brief. Richard Oborn can be reached on 'gazebo@bigpond.net.au' or 0417 835 344.

CONTACT PERSON

The primary contact person for this brief is:

Richard Oborn - gazebo@bigpond.net.au or 0417 835 344