Decent Manners
Make all the Difference

A matter of civility. By DP Sabharwal

Manner is a way of doing something or the way in which a thing is done – e.g. she stared at me in an accusing manner or he was elected secretary in an unusual manner, without voting.

Add suffix 's' and the resulting word 'manners' means quite differently.

While *manner* is concerned with the way you handle yourself, *manners* are concerned with others. In simple terms, it means the way of behaving with others, especially the ways that are socially correct and show respect for others' comfort and feelings e.g. he lacked manners as he kept interrupting the speaker or she displayed good manners as she helped the elderly people to get up.

It is commonly said that it is the manners that correctly and accurately describe a nation, a society, and the individuals who are part of it. The manners depend on individual culture and race. It also depends upon the development and evolving of a country as a whole.

The core of good manners is good behaviour, which is based on the goodness of heart, politeness, mercy, kindness, empathy and so on. Most of the time, it reflects on an individual's grooming and upbringing. Above all, it helps an individual to rise not only in one's own eyes but in the eyes of colleagues and society as well. The bottom line however is what Lilian Gish said: 'You can get through life with bad manners, but it is easier with good manners.'



Consider these

Not walking in the middle of the road. Being on time. Not spitting on the floor. Offering your seat to a lady. Talking politely. Being respectful to elderly people. Trying to be discreet and quiet when blowing your nose. Not yawning with open mouth or stretching legs in front of others. Not interrupting when people are involved in a conversation. Saying 'Please' or 'Thank you' every time someone helps you even in small measures. These and other niceties may seem trivial to many, but it all matters. When you do not use the manners that people have come to expect – like failing to open the door for a woman, for instance – it is not simply a sign that you are clueless; it shows a lack of consideration and lack of good manners.

Good manners are not a matter of simply 'following the rules and displaying good behaviour'. What is important is the reason underlying the desired behaviour. Manners matter, because manners are really about showing respect for another person. When you hold the door for a woman, it is not because she cannot open it herself or there's a rule that says you should. You do so because it is an act of kindness and a way to make the woman feel special.

Let us consider a few simple scenarios on the other side of the canvass. Staring at women. Talking down to women. Ignoring others opinions. Interrupting. Not introducing them. Simply ignoring them altogether. Walking several steps ahead of her rather than beside her. Well, such a behaviour just cannot be brushed aside as being rude or inconsiderate. In fact, it represents a fundamental lack of personal respect. To be fair, most of the time, such behaviour is not intentional. It simply happens because people either 'switch-off' their thinking unconsciously or wander off on a mind journey. Now, whatever the case may be, the fact is, one is inconsiderate and, by plain logic, disrespectful or ill-mannered!

Give it a thought

The whole game of getting noticed and getting respect and recognition in whatever you do when with others is about concern and respect for those other people. Consider the following scenarios and try to understand the principle behind each of the acts. The need for displaying good manners would surface loud and clear.

- Reclining our seat even when it presses against another passenger's knees.
- Discussing others' shortcomings while bragging about our own strengths.
- Forcing food or beverages on guests so as to prove to be a good host.
- Entering a closed room without knocking or asking permission.
- Seeing a stranded person in the middle of the road, carry on driving.
- Playing loud music in your own room, or in your car.
- Not telling the boss about your leave-plan till the last moment.
- Throwing out the skins of fruits or wafer-packets' outer covers from a running car.

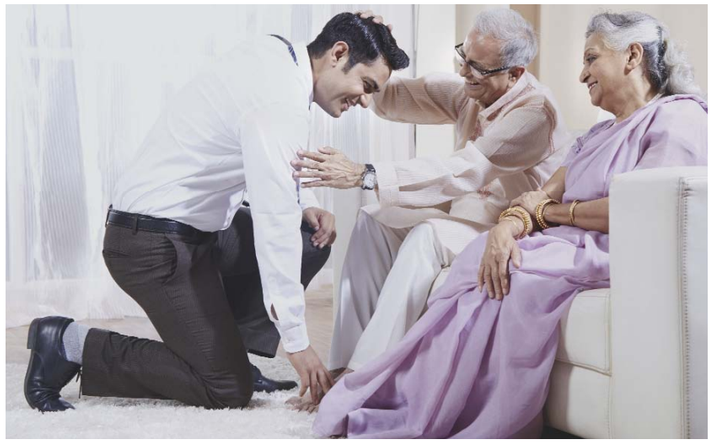
The winner

Once, the chairman of a closely-held company decided to retire, he started looking for a suitable replacement. After a fairly involved selection procedure, he zeroed on to two of his subordinates who were equally competent, hard-working and loyal to the company. One had an excellent record in certain areas, while the other held similar rating in certain other areas. The chairman was really unable to decide whom to select as his successor.

Then one day he invited both of them to his house for drinks and dinner. As the dinner was announced, and the three of them started moving towards the dining hall, he said, "Gentlemen the dinner would last for more than an hour, so in case you wish to ease-out, you may use the wash-room." Both of them used the facility one after another. As they moved to the dining hall, the Chairman had decided that the person who visited the washroom after the first one, deserved to be his successor.

This real-life incident was published many decades ago. How do you think the 'successor' was decided? Well, on the basis of manners. The Chairman had heard the noise of flushing the toilet by the second man and not by the first one.

Sounds bizarre? May be, but it is not so on careful scrutiny. When the first person went in, he had a clean toilet to use but, by not flushing it, he had left a dirty one for the next person! Yes, decent manners can take an individual to the top. We



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A gentleman never insults anyone unintentionally.