

Character Matters: Deference

Limiting my freedom so I do not offend the tastes of others

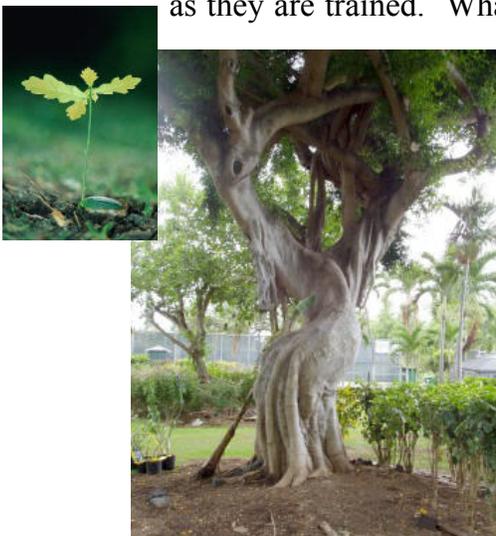
It Matters at Home

A dinner meeting with potential business clients. A three-year-old child. Why don't the two usually go together?

The answer hinges on deference. Small children usually say what they think, demand what they want, and have little understanding of the effects of their behavior on others. "Looking out for number one" is a concept no child has to be taught.

Conversely, deference is a mark of maturity that is expected of adult members of society. But too often in today's world, young people grow into their teens and even beyond without developing this basic social building block. How can we ensure that our children learn to see beyond themselves and begin to put the feelings of others before their own?

The solution lies back with that three-year-old child. Oftentimes parents are guilty of seeing negative behaviors in small children as "cute," without realizing the consequences of not correcting and training those behaviors before they get out of control. Like young, tender plants, children will grow as they are trained. What is cute at three is seldom cute at thirteen or twenty-three!



While we should not overreact and become frustrated that our toddlers do not yet act with perfect decorum and maturity, we should train them toward that end. When they say or

- ◆ *Put others first*
- ◆ *Honor preferences*
- ◆ *Put others at ease*
- ◆ *Yield the right to be right*
- ◆ *Imagine yourself in another's shoes*
- ◆ *Resolve conflicts cordially*

do something that is socially offensive for an adult, explain that to them. Remind them consistently to use good manners. Be an example of deference in the way you interact with others. And talk about the reason why we have manners in the first place: to "do to others as you would have them do to you."

Deference matters - because your three-year-old will be attending those dinner meetings sooner than you think!

It Matters at Work

“She always wants to blare the country station, and I hate country!” “Did you hear that so-and-so is getting a divorce?” “No, we should have the Christmas party at this restaurant, not that one!” “But I thought you’d like me to forward that joke to you!”

Why is daily interaction with other adults so often a chore, rather than a delight? Why does the dream of a positive, “team” atmosphere at times seem impossible to achieve? Could it be a lack of deference?

Simply put, deference is the Golden Rule: do to others as you would have them do to you. All of us believe in it in theory. We want everyone else to practice it. But the responsibility lies with us. A workplace will only be as pleasant as you make it. And often, that means making the choice to turn the conversation away from negative comments or gossip, agreeing to disagree, not forwarding that email, or figuring out a way to compromise.

Another dimension is added when your company deals with customers. We’ve all met the store clerk or “customer service” representative who complains to his coworkers about how long it is till he gets off - all while you are standing there waiting to be helped. Conversely,

V.S. Rudeness

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ #@?/&%! ✓ I was in this seat first, and, besides, I’m exhausted. ✓ This is my music. If they don’t like it - too bad. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ He just needs to learn to be less sensitive. ✓ I’m not going to change my plans just to please her! |
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how pleasant it is to meet the one who smiles, focuses on you, and seems genuinely concerned that you receive all the help you need while you are there. We can mirror either of these attitudes in our responses to those who, in a sense, “give us” our jobs - regardless of whether we are a store clerk or a top-level manager.

Deference matters - because coworkers and customers are people, too!



Justice
Forgiveness
Determination
Sincerity
Truthfulness

- ◆ **Justice** is “taking personal responsibility to uphold what is pure, right, and true.” Deference yields to the tastes and preferences of others, but never compromises justice by yielding to another when it would be wrong to do so.
- ◆ **Forgiveness** is “clearing the record of those who have wronged me and not holding a grudge.” Deference seeks to shield others from embarrassment, but never tries to cover up or ignore wrongdoing in another. Instead, it uses forgiveness to restore relationships with offenders.
- ◆ **Determination** is “purposing to accomplish the right goals, at the right time, regardless of the opposition.” Deference honors others by giving them the opportunity to make decisions, but it is determined not to allow the focus on important goals to be lost.
- ◆ **Sincerity** is “eagerness to do what is right with transparent motives.” Deference limits its own freedom of expression in order not to offend others, but it does not try to “be someone else” just to gain others’ approval. It remains sincere.
- ◆ **Truthfulness** is “earning future trust by accurately reporting past facts.” Deference seeks to resolve conflicts with grace, but it never sacrifices truth in order to do so.