

# Making nice pays off in often nasty world

When did nasty become the new nice? Recent examples abound: see Sen. Joe Wilson (“you lie”); Serena Williams (paraphrasing: “I’ll shove this tennis ball ...”) and Kanye West (paraphrasing again: “actually, Taylor, you’re not the best, despite the lovely award I just handed you.”).

I’m all for speaking your mind, but what happened to considerations like venue, tone and plain old civility?

Politicians, performers, pro athletes and other public figures at least used to mind their public speech, if not some questionable private behavior. Are we now so headline driven that provocative speech and actions are now standard operating procedure, for no other discernible purposes than boosting egos and Google search

rankings?

There’s no need to make the case for vile words or actions that may have been provoked (in the case of Williams, reacting to a line judge’s call), as somehow more excusable than that which is calculated (likely, Sen. Wilson’s). Nasty is nasty. While I admire Williams’s multiple mea culpas, why did she venture there in the first place? West seemed genuinely moved when Jay



KATHY  
METTS

Leno asked how the singer’s late mother would judge his behavior. But why did it get to that?

It wouldn’t bother me that much if I didn’t see evidence in our everyday lives, where a simple thank you for holding a door (heck, even holding a door) is more exception than rule, and where short-form, rapid

electronic communication gives apparent license to say what you want, when you want, to whomever you want, if for no other reason than you can.

But I’m encouraged, because I see a mile-wide opening for nice guys like you and me. Let’s call the opportunity, Remembering The Power of Nice, For Fun and Profit. Two recent events brought it into focus.

My husband and I got stranded waiting for a connecting flight to a long overdue vacation. It was the mother of all delays. An already fit-to-be-tied gate agent, ill-equipped to deal with ever-grouchier passengers — and wearing it on her sleeve — almost exploded when a last-minute gate change was announced.

That combustibility wasn’t lost on our delay’s eldest victim: an adorable, spry, 90-something year-old lady. Having witnessed all she could take, she sidled up to the agent and produced a little pamphlet: 16 Ways to Reduce Stress. (I am not making this up.) “Here, dear, take this. It helps me a lot,” she offered. “I just came from my friend’s 94th birthday, and I’m feeling great.”

The agent literally melted. Our nonagenarian hero’s haggard fellow travelers broke out in smiles, madly dashing for our plane (yes, she made it, too). A simple act of kindness changed all of our days, and I’d bet fundamentally changed that agent’s attitude. The power of nice: workplace-style.

I witnessed that power on a grander scale at a seriously big event my firm recently produced, involving and attended by high-level military personnel.

Many months prior to the event, a well-known relative of a major political figure had committed to be our marquee speaker, and our planning became geared around her.

As fate would have it, the day before the event, our speaker was befallen by a chronic health issue that reared its painful head at the worst time, and she had to pull out. That is, only after trying every pos-

sible treatment and plying every resource, down to keeping her private jet on standby.

She didn’t have a contractual obligation to find a replacement, but that is what she did, even in the throes of wrenching pain. Not just any replacement, but one of her topic’s top experts, who had literally just arrived in town, straight from a humanitarian mission in Angola. Not only did he deliver her remarks, he internalized them and made them his own.

At the end of the day, what did they do? They treated us nicely, putting themselves in our shoes, asking, “How would I want to be treated?” And made something happen.

It created in me a sense of gratitude on a scale I’d never felt professionally. I’m now a deeper supporter of, and evangelist for, the cause to which they’ve dedicated much of their lives — protecting military personnel and civilians in conflict-ridden areas from the devastation wrought by roadside explosives.

Their act of extreme kindness gave me pause to appreciate my own staff even more, for their teamwork, flexibility and professionalism under nearly impossible circumstances, and reminding me of the carrot’s power to motivate over the stick.

We spend so much time worrying about the future or wringing hands over the past. It leaves precious few moments to live in the present and feel that sense of gratitude to others for jobs well done, as they are done.

If you believe as I do that present thinking motivates future action and outcomes, taking time out to acknowledge what is good naturally leads to positive things, strongly influenced by — and generating its own — fundamentally nice behavior.

Call it my nice strategy. Leaving little else to say except, thank you for reading.



Kathy Metts is president of Maryville-based Impact Associates, a management consulting and strategic events firm.

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