

Where Have All The Manners Gone?

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By Richard Andrew King; available at RichardKing.net/books and Amazon.com

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In the 1960s the American folk singing group Peter, Paul and Mary, popularized a Pete Seeger song entitled, *Where Have All The Flowers Gone?* It is not an unfair question in these early years of the 21st Century to ask, "Where have all the manners gone?"

What are manners? Manners are social modes of action expressing respect and deference for others. Manners, or the lack of them, speak to the character of an individual and a culture. The famous German writer, artist and politician Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (18th/19th Centuries) stated:

A man's manners are a mirror in which he shows his portrait.

In other words, an individual's social behavior and conduct reveal who he or she is at their core. Manners are an instant snapshot of a man's mindset and character.

There was a time when young people would automatically address their elders, teachers, employers, etc., as Mr., Mrs., Miss, Ms., Sir, or Ma'am. It was also common for young people to use the words "Please" and "Thank You" with regularity. Never would a young person talk back to a parent, teacher, employer, law enforcement officer, or authority figure.

Yet, this is not the general status of youthful behavior today. There exists a mindset of self-importance, entitlement, equality with adults, rudeness, and a lack of respect across the board with many young people.

Such a condition of mannerless behavior is unseemly, immature, and will not serve young people in the long run. Children are not adults. They have neither the experience, understanding, nor

wisdom that only a life long-lived can create. Until they prove themselves and their worth, they are not entitled to place themselves on par with adults. Certainly they should not show them disrespect. In fact, when children are disrespectful to their elders, they are actually showing a disrespect for themselves and sowing the seeds for themselves being disrespected.

It is not incumbent for adults to show respect to children first. It is children who must demonstrate their respect and manners first to adults. Can a child provide for his own food, shelter, clothing, schooling, activities, etc., that parents provide? No. Children must be taught to recognize the sacrifices their parents and elders make for them and respect them for it.

There is a natural hierarchy to life in which elders should be respected and given deference. Children may be the future, but it is elders who gave them the opportunity of a future. This alone demands respect and acknowledgment, which are encased in the social convention we call *manners*.

How did our youth get this way—mannerless and deprived of an understanding of how to interact with adults? Obviously, one reason is that they were not trained properly. Parents and adults did not insist on their children and young people being respectful. Another reason is that this age seems to be intrinsically afflicted with an infestation of crudeness and entitlement. Richard Buckminster Fuller, 20th Century American futurist, author, inventor, and designer aptly noted:

Parents are usually more careful to bestow knowledge on their children rather than virtue, the art of speaking well rather than doing well; but their manners should be of the greatest concern.

Buckminster Fuller's observation reflects the relationship between true success in life and simple worldly achievement. True success in life is based on an understanding of life, not merely on the ephemeral expression of fame, fortune, titles, celebrity, popularity, and placards on a wall. How life really works – this is what Buckminster Fuller is referencing, and it is a strong foundation in manners that keeps the foundation of society strong and in tact.

When we do not teach our children to have manners, we are hurting their potential for success because we are teaching them to ignore, devalue, discredit, even deprecate the natural order of life. This will not serve them well as they grow into their adulthood. Respect is critical to anyone's success in life, and if such respect is not made an integral part of children's characters their road ahead will not be smooth.

As a father, grandfather, and martial arts instructor I have always, and will always, demand those young people under my care learn and demonstrate respect for themselves and others. I don't know of any substantive martial arts instructor who feels differently. It's fine to be independent and free, but we all live in a social environment, and the social structure demands there be a certain level of respect and deference to others if society is to function smoothly and efficiently. Respect should certainly be given to those who have gone before us and shown the way, who have created a foundation on which we stand, who have given us opportunities we would not otherwise have had it not been for their sacrifices and hard work.

Furthermore, social rank and status are not the sole determiners garnering a show of manners from others. Respect is about acknowledgment, sans titles and certainly sans egos. An elderly person, for example, regardless of race, color, achievement, title, or gender deserves as much respect as a person who has achieved some semblance of worldly accomplishment. There are many, many people in this world who may not have the trappings of what is perceived as being successful but who are truly successful as far as life is concerned. Therefore, manners – and a good set of them – should be demonstrated to all people, especially one's elders.

Teaching Tips

1. Make manners an integral aspect of a child's character. Insist they use the words "Please" and "Thank You" as a natural part of daily living. After all, no one has to do anything for anyone. Have them reference other non-familial adults as Mr., Mrs., Sir, Miss, Ms., or Ma'am.
2. When introducing a new adult to your children, have the children extend their hand while looking the adult in the eyes. This not only shows respect, but it also creates a sense of

confidence in the children because, by looking into someone's eyes as you speak to them, it erases the fear of personal interaction. It's actually quite empowering. In my martial arts business I make every child introduce themselves to adults by shaking their hands and looking them in the eyes while standing upright and speaking clearly and distinctly. This method is empowering because it not only teaches self-confidence and self-assuredness but respect – all qualities that will help the children as they grow into their own adulthood.

3. One unusual but powerful strategy I use is to have my students choose their favorite teacher, approach them, extend their hand, look them in the eyes and say, "Good morning, Mr., Mrs., Ms., or Miss, how are you today?" This is a powerful strategy because it teaches young people to be proactive in establishing themselves as a strong individual who has a sense of respect and manners. In fact, I tell them to "Draw First," which means to extend their hand before anyone else. This makes them active, not reactive, and creates strength and character. How many children actually do this? Can you imagine the talk in the teacher's lounge? Such behavior immediately sets these children apart from the crowd, giving them a reputation that is deserving of respect and admiration, especially from adults and teachers.

4. Monitor your child's manners during social events. Never criticize children for having a lack of manners, but rather talk to them about the positive reasons for having manners, i.e., it shows respect, creates strength, develops confidence, and engenders the good graces of others because it acknowledges them, and who is there who does not want or love to be acknowledged?

The bottom line is that when children demonstrate manners everyone wins. There are no downsides to having respect and deference for others.

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