

Choosing Civility: The Twenty-five Rules of Considerate Conduct by P.M. Forni, Cofounder of the Johns Hopkins Civility Project

Life is difficult: accepting this proposition, the operative challenge for all of us is – can we find ways to work together to find ways to proactively for our mutual benefit?

What is Civility?

Civility-related Notions: [conveying that civility is complex and belongs in the realm of ethics]

Respect for others	Care	Consideration	Courtesy
Golden rule	Niceness	Politeness	Respect of others' feelings
Maturity	Kindness	Manners	Respect of other's opinions
Being accommodating	Fairness	Decency	Self-control
Concern	Justice	Tolerance	Selflessness
Etiquette	Tact	Equality	Community Service
Sincerity	Morality	Honesty	Trustworthiness
Awareness	Friendship	Table manners	Moderation
Listening	Compassion	Being agreeable	Going out of one's way
Friendliness	Propriety	Lending a hand	Abiding by rules
Good citizenship	Peace		

Robert B. Pippin: "Being civil to one another is much more active and positive a good than mere politeness or courtesy, but like many other important goods, such as generosity, gratitude, or solidarity, it is not the sort of thing that can be 'demanded' as a matter of duty, like a moral entitlement."

[Note: is it a reality that can exist only within the context of a reciprocal relationship and is reliant on a trusting understanding that others will respond in kind.]

Civility:

- The everyday practice of demonstrating respect and empathy.
- The habit of considering the reality that no action of ours is without consequences for others; and in anticipating what those consequences might be.
- A byproduct of choosing civility is the enrichment of our own lives.
- The realization that our happiness does not depend on the events of our lives, but rather from how we choose to respond to those events.

Note: we live in an age of *radical individualism* and *cultural relativism*. This is often results in indifference, which is a defensive (protective) response to the barrage of stimuli that can be overwhelming in modern society. Social maturity requires moving beyond such individualism and learning to negotiate the give and take that is inherent in reciprocal relationships.

We can learn to be decent and caring; we can learn to give of ourselves; we can learn to love. How? The same way we learn any others behaviors; in brief, we need someone to teach us and we need practice.

Daniel Goleman: *Emotional self-control is not the same as over-control; i.e., the stifling of all feeling and spontaneity ... When such emotional suppression is chronic, it can impair thinking, hamper intellectual performance and interfere with smooth social interaction. By contrast, emotional competence implies we have a choice as to how we express our feelings.*

Note: in recent years in our society, **assertiveness** has been emphasized and encouraged: “I’m just being honest”, if I express myself, especially in ways that are unchecked by putting things into perspective or by taking into account the social climate and the readiness of others.

Eric Hoffer: *Rudeness is the weak man’s imitation of strength.*

Restraint is an infusion of thinking – and thoughtfulness – into everything we do. We choose the behavior that, although it may not seem the most gratifying now, will make us feel good five minutes from now, tomorrow, or next year. Restraint is the art of feeling good later. In fact, most of life’s wisdom is about choosing what will make us feel good later.

- Allowing others to make their choices
- Balancing self-esteem with self-control

E.M. Forster: *I believe in aristocracy ... if that is the right word, and if a democrat may use it. Not an aristocracy of power, based upon rank and influence, but an aristocracy of the sensitive, the considerate and the plucky. Its members are to be found in all nations and all classes, and all through the ages, and there is a secret understanding between them when they meet. They represent the true human tradition, the one permanent victory of our queer race over cruelty and chaos. Thousands of them perish in obscurity, a few are great names. They are sensitive for others, as for themselves, they are considerate with being fussy, their pluck is not swankiness but the power to endure, and they can take a joke.*

- Being sensitive and assertive at the same time.
- Practicing respect for others as an extension of self-respect.
- Realizing that practicing the art of giving creates a bond (trust) between those involved.

Lessons from the science of love and social support: Dean Ornish: *When you feel loved, nurtured, cared for, supported, and intimate, you are much more likely to be happier and healthier, you have a much lower risk of getting sick and, if you do, a much greater chance of surviving.* Shelley E. Taylor: *Social ties are the cheapest medicine we have.*

In order to be healthy, we need to live among others. Since social integration is healthful, social skills – the skills that make social integration possible – are utterly relevant to our health. When we are skilled in managing our relationships, we are more likely to build and maintain a network of support. Far from being just a matter of good form, civility is also a matter of good health. Quite simply: being good is good for you. To stay healthy we need to perceive our lives as having purpose and meaning. We usually find purpose and meaning linked to the presence of others in our lives. All the more important, then, that we learn how to treat them fairly, respectfully, and considerately. As we do, it becomes clearer and clearer that civility is the place of encounter between Self and Other where altruism and self-interest find a harmonious way to coexist.

The Twenty-Five Rules of Considerate Conduct

1. Pay Attention

Edward M. Hallowell: *A human moment occurs anytime two or more people are together, paying attention to one another.*

M. Scott Peck: *The principle form that the work of love takes is attention.*

- Without attention, no meaningful interaction is possible.
Attention looks two ways: outward and inward.

2. Acknowledge Others

George Washington: *Every action done in company, ought to be with some sign of respect to those that are present.*

3. Think the Best

Ralph Waldo Emerson: *We must be as courteous to a man as we are to a picture, which we are willing to give the advantage of a good light.*

Paul of Tarsus: *Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.*

So, when it comes to (meeting new) people, have great expectations: It will be good for your soul, and it may touch theirs.

4. Listen

Robert Bolton: *The word "listen" is derived from two Anglo-Saxon words. One is "hlystan", which means "hearing". The other is "hyosnian", which means "to wait in suspense". Listening, then, is a combination of hearing what the other person says and a suspenseful waiting, an intense psychological involvement with the other.*

Michael P. Nichols: *Much of the conflict in our lives can be explained by one simple but unhappy fact: we don't really listen to each other.*

- When we don't understand, asking clarifying questions, as opposed to telling (or thinking) the person they are wrong.
- Choices: (a) responding, while listening, by asking for more information vs. (b) reacting by relating what was said to a personal experience, pulling attention away from the other person.
- Good listening has three basic components. When you are ready to listen: (1) plan your listening; (2) show that you are listening; (3) be a cooperative listener.
- Rediscover the power and the allure of silence. Establish eye contact.
- Although you may be forming your own opinions on what is being said, voice them only if you have a clear sense that is what the person that you are listening to expects you to do so and if you are comfortable doing so. The same rule applies to giving advice.

5. Be Inclusive

Glen Van Ekeren: *It takes a variety of people to challenge us, encourage us, promote us, and most of all, help us achieve a broader dimension to ourselves.*

George Bernard Shaw: *The great secret, Eliza, is not having bad manners or good manners or any other sort of manners, but having the same manner for all human souls. In short, behaving as if you were in heaven, where there are no third-class carriages, and one soul is as good as another.*

- One of our strongest yearnings is to be accepted by others. We love being welcomed by individuals, and we delight in the feeling of belonging to a group. Part of our identity is shaped by and within groups; within our groups we find shelter, meaning, and direction. Thus attitudes and words that exclude rather than include are rarely funny. In most cases they hurt.
- Selective conferral of respect is a commonly used weapon in social “power games”. Being inclusive means applying the principle of respect to all persons.

6. Speak Kindly

George Prentice: *A word of kindness is seldom spoken in vain, while witty sayings are as easily lost as the pearls from a broken string.*

Russian proverb: *A kind word is like a spring day.*

- Make sure that you need to speak. Sometimes silence can be kinder and more considerate than words.
- To speak kindly you need to be aware constantly that you are speaking to living, breathing, vulnerable human beings. Don't discount the power of your words.
- You can be angry and civil at the same time. If your anger shows in your tone of voice, explain the reasons for your feelings as rationally and calmly as possible.
- Never utter unkind words to others regarding their identity (racial, national, sexual, etc.) or aspects of their personal life that are essentially irrelevant to the contested issues at hand.
- With kind words, you create a space of sanity and trust into which you invite others for what may be a much needed respite.
- The impact and the importance of body language: e.g., a sincere smile, facial expression, body posture.

7. Don't Speak Ill

Bertrand Russell: *Nobody ever gossips about other people's secret virtues.*

- Positive qualities and behaviors are typically not as discrete or dramatic (noticeable) as negative traits; therefore, they often do not merit specific commentary.
- Negative comments are often a reflection of a competitive mindset; i.e., we rate ourselves in comparison to others.

8. Accept and Give Praise

William James: *The deepest principle in human nature is the craving to be appreciated.*

Mark Twain: *I can live for two months on a good compliment.*

- Express sincere praise as opposed to flattery.
- By sharing with others how we feel about them, we let them know something about themselves and strengthen the bonds between us in the process.
- By saying, “What you are doing is wonderful”, we encourage those who are doing the wonderful thing to keep doing it. Maybe in a small way, we become responsible for the continued existence of something wonderful.
- Many individuals are unaware (or not fully aware) of their own gifts or may not realize how outstanding (and impactful) those gifts are. Through our praise we reveal to people who they are.
- Giving praise, we nurture others’ self-esteem, a crucial factor in their emotional well-being.

Other Dos and Don’ts of Compliments

- Don’t pay a compliment unless it is sincere
- Don’t refrain from paying a compliment thinking that your feelings are already known.
- Don’t confuse complimenting with patronizing.
- Don’t hasten to reciprocate a compliment. If you do, you give the impression that the compliment you received was difficult for you to handle and you felt compelled to rid yourself of it at the first opportunity.
- Word your compliment carefully. Those who receive them will thus know that you have given serious thought to what they did and feel even more validated. Whenever appropriate, make the effort to be specific.
- Start with a person in mind. You needn’t always wait for something to strike you as worthy of a compliment. Focus on someone and ask yourself: what is it that this person does that deserves recognition?
- Rarely do we give the opportunity to compliment someone on something of great import. Why not look for something small, then?

9. Respect Even a Subtle “No”

G.K Chesterton: *Acceptance is the truest kinship with humanity.*

- There are many reasons why a person might say “no” to us that are related to other factors that have nothing to do with us or the purpose of our request to them. They do not owe us an explanation.

10. Respect Others’ Opinions

John Stuart Mill: *If all mankind minus one were of one opinion, an only one person were of contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind.*

- Respecting others’ opinions is part of a larger attitude of respect – respect for the whole person – that we are expected to develop as we grow up. Respect for opinions is not an easy art at all. It requires self-esteem, self-control, sensitivity, tolerance, fairness, and generosity. And it applies both to stated opinions and to opinions that are left unspoken.

- There are at least two ways of showing disrespect for others on account of what they think. One is by telling them that their opinions are crazy, stupid, worthless, and the like. The other is by assuming that that we think must be what they think also. Respecting others' opinions doesn't mean being untrue to our own. It simply requires us to recognize that others are entitled to look at the world differently and that when they share their views with us they can expect a fair hearing.
- Since what we believe is an integral part of who we are, we tend to perceive criticism directed at our opinions as rejection. When that happens, defensiveness and resentment can put an end to dialogue.

11. Mind Your Body

[N.B.: this has to do with personal grooming; it will not be emphasized in the presentation.]

12. Be Agreeable

Benjamin Franklin: *If you would be loved, love and be lovable.*

Jane Austen: *I do not want people to be very agreeable, as it saves me the trouble of liking them a great deal.*

- Do you know people who are incapable or unwilling to harmonize their needs and preferences with those of others – even their closest friends? Chronic dissenters are a tiresome bunch.
- There are two fundamental abilities to cultivate in order to be agreeable in conversation:
 - The ability to consider that you might be wrong.
 - The ability to admit that you don't know.
- Not only do we need to learn how to give, we must also become proficient in the difficult art of receiving,

13. Keep It Down (and Rediscover Silence)

Ralph Waldo Emerson: *Let us be silent – so we may hear the whisper of the gods.*

- In an age when background noises are virtually constant, we (some of us) are slowly becoming inured to noise.

14. Respect Other People's Time

Jean-Jacques Rousseau: *All that time is lost which might be better employed.*

Benjamin Franklin: *Dost thou love life? Then do not squander time; for that's the stuff life is made of.*

- Punctuality is nonnegotiable. Arriving on time is a basic rule of considerate behavior.
- Be careful not to hold others "hostage" (in terms of their time and other priorities).
- Always give others the amount of time they can rightfully expect from you.

15. Respect Other People's Space

- Note: this includes touching and other physical contact as well as positioning in conversations.
- Not intruding or otherwise observing in the personal areas (e.g., office, desk, bedrooms (in a home)).

16. Apologize Earnestly

Daniel Jankelovich: *Most apologies are gestures of empathy; they express regret for offending someone else's feelings or concerns. Apologizing implies that you are aware of the feelings of another and can empathize sufficiently to regret having injured that person.*

- Why is it so difficult to apologize? Because to articulate an earnest apology we need to win a struggle with our own pride.
- Don't assume that your apology will be always and immediately well received. Your acknowledgement of your wrongdoing does not necessarily erase their hurt. They may need time to grant you the forgiveness you are seeking.

17. Assert Yourself

Robert Bolton: *The assertive person stands up for her own rights and expresses her personal needs, values, concerns, and ideas in direct and appropriate ways. While meeting her own needs, she does not violate the needs of others or trespass on their personal space.*

Henry Dreber: *Assertiveness and the quest for meaning go hand in hand.*

- Becoming assertive means, to a large extent, learning to say "no".
- Every time you succeed in establishing a healthy boundary, taking a stand of self-protection, having your feelings heard, or eliciting respect for your autonomy, you rouse the deep part of yourself that feels worthy of selfhood. These actions and reflections ... are not only a balm for the soul, they are a boon to our health.

18. Avoid Personal Questions

- Our curiosity does not give us license to ask intrusive questions.
- Each of us may need to develop tactful strategies for protecting our privacy from unwarranted inquiries.

19. Care for Your Guests

- Definition of *hospitality*: creating a space that allows and encourages guests to be themselves.
- Your guest should not feel that they must earn your hospitality.
- An amusing story of hospitality, as it might apply to long-term guests: A few years ago I arrived at a friend's home at the onset of a weeklong visit. He greeted me at the door with a hearty, "Welcome! Make yourself at home!" I thanked him and assured him that I would indeed be comfortable. In response he elaborated, "My house is your house!" So again, I thanked him for his hospitality – and again he upped the ante. "My kitchen is your kitchen", he said, and before I could reply, his welcome continued: "My grocery store is your grocery store", he explained. "my stove is your stove, my dishwasher is your dishwasher, my broom is your broom". He stopped, grinned at me, and asked, "Do you get the idea?" I nodded.
- The essential goal of playing host is that of getting to know your guests better and strengthening your mutual bonds. To do that you only need to listen and talk from the heart.

20. Be a Considerate Guest

William Shakespeare: *Unbidden guests are often welcomest when they are gone.*

- Never force an invitation.
- Your guiding principle is that you want to leave somebody else's space as undisturbed as possible.
- Support and respect the efforts of the host(s) and give them time and space to perform the demands of the household and of their (larger; i.e., beyond the presence of guests) life.

21. Think Twice Before Asking for Favors

Janet Gallant: *Don't ask for favors too casually or too often – recognize the amount of effort you're requesting. If possible, accomplish your task in some other way . . . be clearly grateful for a favor done. Even if the task appeared easy for the person, give full credit – the person may be keeping the difficulties or unpleasantness of the effort from you.*

- Find appropriate ways of expressing your gratitude.
- Reaching out to others who may find it difficult (for whatever reason) to ask for help or support.

22. Refrain from Idle Complaints

Chinese Proverb: *Don't curse the darkness – light a candle.*

Anne Frank: *Then I do not think of all the misery, but of the glory that remains.*

- This is not an appeal to looking at the problems that arise in life through “rose-colored glasses”.
- To maintain our effectiveness and personal integrity, it is imperative that we live our lives **proactively** as opposed to **reactively**.
- The risk of living our lives reactively is that the factors that determine our behavior are outside of us and largely beyond our direct control.

23. Accept and Give Constructive Criticism

Mark I. Rosen: *A good friend will listen to us without judgment, accept the intensity of our feelings, respect our pain, and express concern. A really good friend will, in addition, help us to see our situation in a new way.*

Carrie ten Boom: *Our critics are the unpaid guardians of our souls.*

Elias Canetti: *I hate judgment that only crush and don't transform.*

Ralph Waldo Emerson: *Let me never fall into the vulgar mistake of dreaming that I am persecuted whenever I am contradicted.*

- To criticize is a serious business and sometimes an awesome responsibility. Before you speak make sure that your intention is to help with a problem and not to humiliate, manipulate, or exact revenge.
- Consider asking the other person for permission (assessing their readiness to listen open-mindedly) to broach a delicate matter.
- To make your criticism constructive and effective:
 - Identify an issue, rather than launching an attack on the person.
 - Describe what you have observed rather than uttering accusations or engaging in name-calling.
 - Show you understand how the other person may feel; and don't forget that your focus here is not on past similar situations but on the present and the future.

- Suggest a solution if you feel this is the right time to do so.
- Remain calm, kind, and empathetic throughout the exchange.
- It is almost impossible not to enjoy the sense of validation that comes with praise, but it is criticism that makes us learn what we are unable or unwilling to learn by ourselves. Whenever we turn our backs on good criticism we do so at our own peril.

24. Respect the Environment and Be Gentle to Animals

Stephen R. Kellert: *We need to establish, as basic goals for our society, both preserving the environment's health and incorporating the routine experience of nature into our everyday lives.*

Timothy Egan: *More than ever, people view their dogs as family, with all the rights of the dominant species without tails.*

Native American saying: *We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children.*

- We should be mindful that civility, in our relationships with the environment and other forms of life, varies; that is, while there are serious problems and disagreement, significant progress has also been made.
 - The emerging attitude (globally) is that nature is in danger, so we must defend it from ourselves. It is not that we have lost the ability to regard nature with awe and fear. Flash floods, brush fires, earthquakes, and hurricanes are powerful and destructive.
 - But we feel much more in control and in our ability to cope than we were in times past.
 - We have come to the realization that we are much more a threat to nature than nature is to us
 - Only two or three generations ago it was commonplace to describe progress as the subjugation of nature by man.
 - Today we are more likely to think of progress as freeing nature from the lethal embrace of a recklessly wasteful and polluting humanity.
- Among the civilizing lessons we want to impress upon the next generation is that the way we treat animals is a measure of our character.

25. Don't Shift Responsibility and Blame

- The most commonly practices form of problem solving is: finding someone to blame.
- The major limitation with this approach is that it focuses on the past, which is over and done with, and leaves begging: what can I/we do now?