

What Does Civility Look Like, Sound Like, Feel Like!?

The true test of civility is an intention and commitment to verbal, written communication and actions that are positive and declarative and behaviors that are simple, sensitive, sensible, constructive, positive, helpful, empathetic and benefit the recipient out of proportion positively to the sender. Any other pathways forward can lead only to trouble, prolong problems and delay mitigation and resolution. Empathy which is so often and mistakenly interpreted to mean, "putting yourself in someone else's shoes," which is impossible and often insulting or revictimizing, means positive deeds that speak for themselves louder and more constructively than words can.

Civility and Decency Are Always About Reconciliation, Engagement, Mutual Understanding, Trust And Respect.

I define trust as the absence of fear, and fear as the absence of trust. When you boil it down, the hardest thing about decency is that it is always about someone else, something else, and only indirectly, for our own personal, emotional benefit.

It's about trust.

It seems to me that the secret of continuing America's greatness is to move into a period of reconciliation and engagement, mutual understanding based on truthfulness, openness and constant acts of civility and small decencies that bind us together as neighbors and as a nation, in trust rather than in fear. Just remember, Decency, Humility, Honesty, Integrity Are Personal Behaviors Purposely Chosen.

The table below might be useful, to motivate and monitor yourself, maybe others as well. Could be personally very informative keeping track of your own acts of decency and perhaps incivility just to get a sense of your own impact on others. Just use the simple checklist below to daily audit your performance in each category. My guess is if you do something like this even for a little while you're going to have some interesting conversations with people you care about who care about you.

| Ingredients of Goodness | Civility/Simple Decencies |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| – Apology | – How can I help you |
| – Candor | – How nice of you |
| – Decency | – I can do that |
| – Empathy | – I'm sorry |
| – Engagement | – Let me help you |
| – Honesty | – My pleasure |
| – Humility | – Please ask me, I'm ready to help |
| – Openness | – Please forgive me |
| – Responsiveness | – Thank you |
| – Transparency | – Yes |
| – Truthfulness | – You're Welcome |

What is the Point?

1. **Leaders and smart managers know.** The simple truth is that the choice between aberrant, improper and unethical behavior and ethical alternatives is clear, known to a decision-maker as it is to a child, because it's what their mothers taught them several times during their lives.
2. **Once caught, the truth comes out.** I have to say, that when I enter into a circumstance where there clearly has been executive misbehavior, I never have to ask the question, "What were you thinking?" That's because the "smart" person has probably, especially if they are a senior executive, already talked to their mother about it. Their mother, although supportive, will ask some pretty pointed questions, such as "What were you thinking?" I actually ask senior executives, "What did your mother say when you told her?" Quite often, interestingly enough, when an executive knows he or she is in trouble, before they consult their attorneys or some of the wiser heads around them, they get advice from mom first.

The reason this is important is because my first question can then be, "What is the truth?", "What really happened?", "Why are we together today, solving this kind of problem?"

3. **The neglect and avoidance of civility, decency, and ethics is justified every day.** In the development of *The Decency Code*, we interviewed many executives and when we discussed sexual harassment there was often a completely negative reaction from men, and just a few women, that this whole issue is overblown and really not that serious or prevalent. When we pursued what "not serious or prevalent" meant, one executive, out of frustration said, because the whole subject is, "unfair to men." Even with the enormous coverage of these behaviors and very high profile successful prosecutions of well known individuals, this feeling, especially at higher levels of management and leadership, persists. Discussing the abuse of women is somehow anti-men. The lesson is that we have an enormous distance to travel to eradicate the passive acceptance of this abusive behavior. Evidence of the ubiquity of this behavior in organizations is so pervasive that it could reasonably be considered a pandemic.
4. **Be wary of those who advocate seeking a "balanced approach."** This is cover code to justify demeaning life and health to justify making rich people richer at the expense of victims. The argument itself is completely ridiculous. In the choice between economic necessity and the additional individuals who will needlessly die as a result of this public policy, how can we make such a decision in a balanced way? How many deaths is an uptick of one point in the DOW worth?
5. **The Lexicon of Decency's Enemies.** I have collected and named these unconscionable behaviors. They are contained in a separate document in this newsletter.
6. **Defeating decency's enemies requires at least five constructive and persistent actions:**
 - a) **Speak up.** Shrug off the numbness that has developed in our culture about these unwanted behaviors.
 - b) **Work within your own organizations to consciously adopt the ethical philosophy of searching for ideal behavior in everything that is done.** This also means then rejecting those things that are less than ideal or blatantly unconscionable.

- c) **Name the offending behaviors, intentions, ideas, and strategies.** The reluctance to name or to simply debate whether or not something should be named are powerful tools for decency's enemies to get lost in a bunch of semantic rabbit holes all the while allowing self-forgiveness to prevail and indecency to continue.
- d) **Seek out, establish, and support leaders who will visibly and aggressively champion civility, decency, integrity, and trust.** They will lead the search to establish ideal behaviors and eradicate those behaviors that are something else.
- e) **Detoxify our language and behaviors needs to become something we aspire to accomplish and expect of others every day.** Both to have better lives and to repel decency's enemies.

How to Begin or Enhance Your Search for Ideal Behavior

Just ask yourself the following simple questions:

- Is your tummy okay with what you are about to decide, do, or suggest?
- Is what you are planning to do simple, sensible, constructive, positive, helpful, useful, and obviously ideal?
- Is what you are planning on doing promoting or imposing something your mother would endorse and approve of? Does it pass the straight faced, eye contact test?
- Does it avoid questions like "Are you kidding?" "What are you thinking?" "Tell me again, what's ideal about this?" Does it meet the requirements of The Decency Code: Civility, Compassion, Empathy, Honesty, Humility, and Principled?

It is amazing how doing the right thing, the expected thing quickly passes all these tests. If you find yourself getting stuck on these requirements at first, simply bail on what you are thinking about doing. Start over again, and go for The Decency Code template: civility, decency, integrity, and trust.