

# Yes, Good Manners Count – a Lot

Using basic rules of etiquette says a lot about you as a leader.

*By Kate Zabriskie*

**A**t one time or another, you’ve probably had the unpleasant experience of being treated rudely, ignored, or abandoned altogether by people whose job it is to provide you with a product or service. Infuriating? You bet. Correctable? Absolutely.

Sadly, genuine good manners are less and less common these days, and why is that? Do people believe they’re simply too busy? Do they not know what they’re supposed to do? Did no one ever teach them what’s acceptable? Who knows? And frankly, the reasons for failure are less important than the solution – consistent application of some often overlooked essentials.

Whether your customer is a potential donor, a client looking for information, or someone calling to learn your office hours, you want their impression of your organization to be the best it can be. People sometimes sabotage that impression by forgetting fundamental good manners. Here are some suggestions to help integrate social niceties and common courtesies into your practices.

**Start your interaction on the right foot.** By definition, you’ve only one chance to make a first impression. Don’t squander it by being indifferent. Begin with a simple display of common courtesies.

**If you’re meeting someone in person,** smile, stand or sit up straight, and greet them with “Hello,” “Good morning,” “Good afternoon,” or “Welcome.”

**If you’re meeting them on the phone,** smile even though they can’t see you. Your tone will be more friendly if you have a smile on your face.

**When using e-mail,** get to the point quickly. Make your message clear, direct, and straightforward. Don’t try to be funny or sarcastic; tone doesn’t come across well in e-mails. Don’t use emoticons; they have no place in business communication. Reread your message carefully before sending it. When you get a response, answer it quickly. If you’re too busy to respond fully at the moment, say, “Thanks! I’ll send you an answer by tomorrow.” And then keep your promise.



MANNERS  
COST  
NOTHING

“Please” and “thank you” are the WD-40 of solid customer service.”

**Say “Please” and “Thank you,” and do it often.** “Please” and “thank you” are the WD-40 of solid customer service. Used with sincerity, those three words build rapport, demonstrate respect, and quiet the occasional squeaky wheel.

**Be mentally present when interacting with the people you serve.** For starters, stop toying with pencils, rubber bands, or paperclips. Put away your smart phone, close your tablet, mute your intercom, maintain eye contact, and listen. That doesn’t mean your interactions will take more time; in fact, they might take less because people will reward you for putting them first.

**Let the people you serve know what happens next.** It may be old hat to you, but most people aren’t aware of your processes. Eliminate uncertainty by taking time to familiarize people with how things work. Think ahead to anything that might make them uncomfortable, and do what you can to alleviate anxiety. For example, “Mrs. Jones, I’m going to give you a few minutes to change. Please put on this gown so the opening is in the front. When you’re ready, if you’ll flip this switch, a light in the hall will let me know you’re ready. Before I leave, do you have any questions for me?”

**Be genuine.** “Your call is very important to us. So important, in fact, that we’re going to respond to it in the order in which it was received by someone on the other side of the international dateline. So important that while you wait for that distant person to wake up, we’ll entertain you with a medley of boy-band favorites interrupted every 30 seconds by a voiceover that says ‘Your call is very important to us.’” Convincing? Oh yeah, totally.

In a world crowded with insincere messages, you can stand out by taking time to put yourself in the position of your customers. That’s the essence of good manners – imagining yourself in the place of other people and doing what you can to make them feel good. 

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“Please”

“GOOD JOB”

“Thank You”

“Good Morning”

“Good Afternoon”

“Welcome”

“Well Done”

### How to Please Your Donors, Clients, Staff, Board, & Other Customers

Build good relationships with *all* your customers, using tips from articles such as these at [NonprofitWorld.org](http://NonprofitWorld.org):

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**Are You Delighting Your Customers?** (Vol. 18, No. 5)

**Earn People’s Loyalty: Here’s How** (Vol. 17, No. 5)

**Cynicism Rx: Authentic Communication** (Vol. 24, No. 6)

**Why Feedback Is the Key to Your Success** (Vol. 35, No. 3)

**The Word You Hear Most Often in Fundraising** (Vol. 28, No. 4)

**Focus on Your Customers as Well as Your Clients** (Vol. 22, No. 2)