

**In Your Face:  
Why Courtesy and Respect?**

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## Summary

You drive the speed limit but someone runs up your bumper demanding you get out of the way so he can drive 20 miles over the limit.

You ask someone to stop their kids from running amok during the movie. They tell you they paid for a ticket so the kids can do what they want.

You see professional athletes fight like little kids, show little respect for opponents, and throw tantrums over "bad calls."

Whatever happened to courtesy, respect, and sportsmanship? This video contends courtesy (which means respect for others) is basic to civilization.

- ◆ The parable of the eccentric billionaire explores the conflict between "me first" and "the good of society".
- ◆ Show your students how to stand up for their rights, and still show respect and courtesy.
- ◆ Teach "defensive courtesy" as a way to escape aggressive drivers who turn freeways into free-for-alls.
- ◆ Learn how to avoid attack/defend cycles that turn minor disputes into potential blow-ups.
- Is sportsmanship a quaint, outdated idea? Is winning everything? What does respect have to do with the world of sport?

## **Script Excerpts & Commentary**

### **Script**

Have we become a bunch of crude, rude boors compared to our well-mannered grandparents?

Are politeness and etiquette quaint customs out of touch with modern times? In some ways, yes.

What folks in the early 1900s considered "well-mannered" we would label as silly. What was once unthinkably rude is today ordinary. It's not courtesy that's "old-fashioned," but specific behaviors once used to show courtesy.

### **Commentary**

*This is an important point to understand. Surveys reveal that we currently believe people in the past were more respectful and polite.*

*A 1995 survey by Princeton Survey Research Associates for **Newsweek** found 61% of the general public agrees Americans are rude. A 1996 Gallup poll found that eight in ten think we're less civil now than we were ten years ago. 67% think we are more likely to use vulgar language than ten years ago, and 75% think parents are less civil about keeping their children under control. 71% think drivers are less civil.*

*The belief in a kinder, gentler past is common, but historians can find many examples of a past filled with behavior we today would find unbelievably rude. In George Washington's "Rules of Civility and Decent Behaviour" he finds it necessary to remind readers not to use the tablecloth to clean their teeth.*

### **Script — The Past Was Polite, We're Rude**

Courtesy is basic to civilization. In fact, we sometimes call it civility. Courtesy is NOT about following rules, it IS about showing respect for others.

A few centuries ago they didn't talk about dissen -- they talked more about honor and dishonor -- same idea though. They might settle disputes with a gun duel to the death.

It was considered dishonorable to turn down a challenge to a duel. Lots of early American politicians were killed in duels -- senseless killings over minor matters of respect.

### **Commentary**

*Alexander Hamilton who was Secretary of the Treasury was killed in a duel and President Andrew Jackson took part in many. Between the American Revolution and the Civil War, the American South was ruled by the "Code of Honor." At the core of this code was the duel, a formal shoot-out with pistols at forty paces.*

*Less than a year after he signed the Declaration of Independence, Button Gwinnett was killed in a duel in Georgia (Gwinnett county is named after him). The president of Yale preached to his students in 1804 about the evils of dueling. The list of politicians involved in duels from 1800 to the Civil War is lengthy.*

*Imagine if the same "code of honor" held today and duels to the death would be fought between Congressmen, judges, and governors.*

### **Script — The Ten Thousand Dollar Button**

Imagine that you are one of 10 strangers brought together by a billionaire known for his habit of giving away large sums of money. Each of you has a separate room and cannot communicate with the others.

Each room contains a large red button with these instructions: "If all 10 of you refrain from pressing this button you will receive \$10,000 each. But if at least one of you presses the button, all those who press it will receive \$2,000 and those who refrain from pushing the button will receive nothing."

What do you do? Press the button for a sure \$2,000 or refrain in the hopes that everyone else does and you will gain \$10,000? But if some idiot pushes the button and you don't, you get nothing. Do you press the button or not?

### **Commentary**

*This story of the "eccentric billionaire" is a variation on the classic "prisoner's dilemma." The point is that if each individual acts on short term "take-what-I-can-get" attitude, the group as a whole is less well off. If each person refrains from pushing the button, everyone comes out ahead.*

*The parable applies to many aspects of daily living and is used here to illustrate the value of courtesy. Showing respect for others instead of thinking only of oneself reaps rewards for everyone — if all cooperate. The dilemma of the ten invitees to the hotel represents the choice we all face in balancing*

### **Script — The Skateboarders**

Consider the problem of skateboarding near stores. Skateboarders love those sidewalks. But shoppers, especially older ones, fear for their safety.

Merchants complain. So what happens?

**Skateboarder:** "This is a public sidewalk, isn't it?"

**Parent:** "My kids can play wherever they want -- it's my tax dollars that pays for it."

**Narrator:** In other words, both parents and kids push the "individual freedom" button. So the city council passes an ordinance restricting the use of skateboards. Now the problem is not manners or respect, it's the law. That involves the police and courts and lawyers. A society is not made more free by the existence of more laws. Pushing the individual freedom button sometimes creates restrictions on us all.

**Commentary:** *The situation of the "skateboarders versus the merchants and pedestrians" contains some of the same conflicts as the "prisoner's dilemma." It illustrates that respect for others can actually create freedom while its absence sometimes leads to more laws and added restrictions. Discuss examples of laws and restrictions we would not need if we lived in a respect-full community. The "community" could be a school as well as a city or nation. People see daily life as a kind of competition in which they have to "win." Winning means sneaking ahead in traffic, getting a good seat, getting ahead in line. They turn everyday situations into competitions. The individual goal of winning becomes more important than mutual respect.*

### **Script — The Disputed Restaurant Bill**

Being courteous does not mean being a wimp or a loser. You can be assertive and still respectful.

For example, you and a casual friend are having lunch. The understanding is you will split the bill -- after all, this isn't a date.

You mentally calculate your share of the bill and decide \$10 should suffice. But your friend examines the bill and says to you, "Looks like \$18 should cover your share." What do you do?

### **Commentary**

*This segment illustrates how to avoid turning a simple dispute into a major disagreement. The prime suggestion is to express your "beef" in terms of an I-statement. Nancy does NOT say "what are you trying to pull here." Instead, she says "I get a different number; let's take a look at the bill." The former statement puts Fran on the defensive and under attack, the latter is more neutral and suggests a desire to engage in mutual problem solving.*

### **Script — Talking in the Movies**

Here's another situation. You're watching a movie and the twosome in the row ahead of you is engaged in non-stop conversation. What do you do?

In the early days of movies audiences routinely joined in hissing the villain and cheering when the damsel in distress was rescued. Movies may have been silent, but audiences were not.

Times change and today such behavior would be rude. As a viewer in a public theater you want to be lost in the movie, not reminded you're in a theater. Talking breaks the "spell" cast by movie magic.

So what do you do when the folks ahead forget about the audience and act as if they're watching TV at home?

### **Commentary**

*The point here is that behavior changes with time. Audiences for many events were expected to voice their reactions with hisses, boos, and cheers.*

*A speech before either house in the Congress of the United States is greeted with quite respect (coupled with a lot of pure avoidance). In the Parliament of England speeches receive vocal encouragement and formalized "catcalls". What is rude in one situation is inappropriate in another.*

*A sermon in some churches is greeted by enthusiastic "amens" but respectful silence in others.*

*Television makes little demands on viewer behavior, but a public theater requires conforming to audience expectations. Quite in a movie theater relates to the traditional "suspension of disbelief." In other words, viewers make the movie "real" by suspending the real world and entering that of the movie or play. Conversation by others is a reminder of the outside world, so breaks the "spell" of fiction.*

*Judith Martin (better known as Miss Manners) claims that "The general problem is that people are used to entertainment in their own living room. There, they can set their own standards—eat or talk or neck or all three. What you do in your house among consenting adults is fine. But when you go out there is a group standard."*

*So what's the best guideline for audience behavior? Respect the environment, be it a nightclub, restaurant, movie theater, or concert hall. The general rule is to not ruin the experience for anyone else.*

### **Script — Road Rage**

*(Looks in rearview mirror and sees tailgater)* What's your problem? What does he want, I'm going close to the speed limit! So, I'm supposed to break the law just because he wants to speed? I have just as much rights as he does. Who does he think he is? I'm not budging.

So does Chris have a right to drive in the lane she wants to below the speed limit? Does the tailgater have the right to assert his desire to pass? Is she upholding the law or merely causing frustration?

### **Commentary**

*A study by the American Automobile Association for Traffic Safety found that road violence increased 51% between 1990 and 1995. Nationwide, ten thousand violent clashes led to 213 deaths and over twelve thousand injuries. Most of the road violence is by males age 18 to 26. Only about 4% of aggressive driving incidents involve women.*

*Take the feeling of hostility and vent it in crowded traffic and you have the potential for open warfare. Drivers need to see themselves as part of a cooperative venture, not in a competitive contest. Many researchers believe there is a growing trend of simple aggressive behavior (call it road rage) in which a driver reacts angrily to other drivers. Cutting them off, tailgating, giving the finger are common forms of nonviolent fury. Others believe these displays of rudeness are noticed more because roads are more congested than in past decades.*

*Discuss: Why are people who rarely act aggressively suddenly turn into "road warriors" once they get behind the wheel?*

### **Script — The World of Sports**

The world of sport is like a parallel universe. A universe that springs to life at the sound of a buzzer, a horn, a whistle, or a starter's gun. Participants in this world wear special costumes. They act in arenas, fields, or courts marked with clear lines that define the world. The world of sport has police who also act as judges. The rules are demanding, but the umpire's call is beyond dispute -- there is no higher court to appeal a strike three.

Punishment in this world is clear and swift. The officials award free throws, extra yards, or can even eject players from the world -- at least until the next game. Like our day-to-day world, sport runs best when both players and fans show respect. In this universe it's called sportsmanship.

### **Commentary**

*This concept of sport as an "alternate world" is more than a figure of speech. In a sporting event the ordinary universe is replaced by the new world with its own time system, boundaries, rules, police, taboos, traditions, costumes, manners, gods, heroes, and definitions of the ideal being.*

*Sportsmanship is to this parallel universe what courtesy and respect is to the "real" world.*

### **Script — Is Winning Everything?**

Is sportsmanship as outdated as the two handed jump shot in basketball? Some coaches teach that "winning is everything." But since there is only one winner and many entrants, such an attitude condemns sport to being a place where most players are "nothings." A miserable society, indeed.

Choosing winning as the only goal is like pressing the red button. It guarantees everybody loses in the long run. Sportsmanship includes respect for your opponent. Examples of a decline in sportsmanship include trash talk, challenging officials, refusing to shake hands with the opponents after the game, and making excuses after every loss.

### **Commentary**

*Discuss the idea that "winning is everything" in terms of how that attitude would affect the behavior of the players. How does the behavior of professional athletes influence youngsters learning the sport?*

*Are players who are "poor sports" likely to be rude players of the game of life as well? Does sport teach the need for sportsmanship?*

### **Script**

Sportsmanship requires you call shots foul or fair as you see them and give your opponent the benefit of the doubt.

So, whether you're on the highway or the baseball diamond, respect for others helps create a comfortable society.

Thinking of others is a sign of respect and it has a tendency to "catch on." If you show respect, you'll find more of it shown to you.

If you believe the world is your garbage can.....that's exactly what it will become.

If you believe winning is everything, then the world of sport will be basically a miserable place.

So courtesy is not a set of old fashioned rules for times gone by; it's an attitude in which we co-operate with others to create a more livable, comfortable society.

*Most people believe they know what sportsmanship is, but a commonly agreed upon definition is not easy to find. One approach is to describe sportsmanship as the display of ethical standards, even when they conflict with some gain in the sporting event.*

*Discussion: What do you think about these comments?*

*"Sport build character? Wake up and smell the 'greenbacks.'"*

*"Nobody expects athletes today to be more, we only expect them to win."*

*"You do what you have to do to win, and you do it to them before they do it to you. Fair play has nothing to do with it."*