



Say This, Not That : Guide to Social Media Manners

In 35 years of business ownership, I've seen a lot of change. It's hard to even remember a time when we didn't rely on computers. It makes me laugh to remember my first cell phone. It was about the size of a shoe with a huge antennae that stuck out of my purse - sort of like carrying a large umbrella. And all you could use it for was phone calls - remember that?!

Change comes so quickly you can blink and find yourself staring at something new you must adapt to. The key to maintaining your equilibrium in our fast-paced world is holding fast to those things that are unchanging.

One thing that will never change is the importance of relationships. Regardless of how many gadgets you own, success revolves around relationships. This applies to success in business, marriage, parenting - success in everything.

Strategies change but principles don't. And so it is with etiquette and manners in the context of Social Media. I smile to think that Miss Manners' Guide to Excruciatingly Correct Behavior has been updated to include cell phone etiquette. There have always been those who set the gold standard for manners (especially in my world, but that's a story for another time). That gold standard has not yet been set in the world of Social Media, so I'm jumping in to help set the bar high.

Social Media Manners - 3 Foundational Truths to Build On

1. Do what you say, say what you mean, be what you seem. In other words, be yourself. Your best self. It was ingrained in me that "if you always tell the truth, you'll never have to remember what you told who." It's all about being anchored to the core values of integrity & authenticity.

2. Be nice. Robert Fulghum's simplification of this important truth resulted in his bestseller, "All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten". His list of rules directly applies to Social Media:

"Share everything.
Play fair.
Don't hit people.
Put things back where you found them.
Clean up your own mess.
Don't take things that aren't yours.
Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody.
Hold hands and stick together.
Be aware of wonder."

3. Get over yourself, it's not about you. I had to learn years ago not to live by feelings and emotions (as valid as they may be) in order to stay focused on the truly important things. I refer to core values a lot, and it's because they ARE the truly important things. Behavior that is motivated by kindness and consideration may ride in new forms in our digital, high tech world, but the core values of caring and a generous spirit are the bedrock to build on.

Powerful Transmitters - Weak Receivers

The term "high tech, high touch" might be overused, but the application of that thinking must stay at the forefront. Though Social Media has changed the way the world does business, we have to push back at the disturbing down side that results in depersonalization and isolation.

Technology has given us the capability to navigate on a global scale, download and upload information instantly from almost anywhere, text, send emails and a full menu of digital options. **Though we each have nearly unlimited capabilities as powerful transmitting stations, when it comes to processing and accurately discerning the intent of personal communications, we are often feeble receiving sets.** In our haste to increase our technological fitness, we have allowed other aspects of meaningful communication to atrophy.

Psychologists say that **non-verbal communication represents two-thirds of all communication.** Experts even assign "channels" to non-verbal communication such as gestures and touch, posture, facial expression and eye contact. Others important aspects of communication include voice quality, rate, pitch and intonation. Think about this: every single one of those cues are absent in Social Media. The keyboard delivers the message, so we no longer even have the benefit of seeing someone's handwriting.

The Death of Conversation & Why it Must Rise Again

It seems the art of conversation is disappearing and it's a loss we can't afford. I cringed recently as I read an article in a prominent publication saying that traditional manners have been replaced with new rules. One example is the current trend of not leaving voice messages since the receiver can see who called. Supposedly, a call-back is expected and a voice message could be perceived as a waste of valuable time. Stop. Enough of that insanity. Your voice and your message count, in more ways than one.

At times, the Generation called "The Millennials", (those born between 1982 and 2000) have been accused of sacrificing manners and courtesy in lieu of their love for technology. For the record, I think that's an inaccurate generalization. This is a cultural problem, not a generational one. Along with many Baby Boomers, I've fully embraced technology and consider it a responsibility to translate the intent of good manners into our digital world.

That's why **social media etiquette should be a required course, not an elective, for everyone.** From young people creating an immutable digital footprint to businesses communicating the essence of their brand, there are things you MUST know. The future of your online reputation depends on it.

The Hot Spots

A challenge in learning Social Media Manners is that the channels are proliferating like rabbits, and each channel has its own protocol.

To simplify, let's consider a brief description of the most popular channels. I compare the atmosphere of these channels to social situations you are familiar with.

Twitter is like an outdoor concert. It's "come as you are", noisy and busy. If you're a people watcher, you'll love Twitter. You'll see the good the bad and the ugly. **My favorite thing** about Twitter is that it gives you access to people you would not normally be able to connect with.

FaceBook is like a big backyard barbecue. Dress is casual but you're likely to encounter anyone from your grandmother to your boss. **My favorite thing** about FaceBook is the huge volume of people who log in daily, spending hours on this popular site.

LinkedIn is a virtual business convention. It is rather formal; business attire and behavior are expected. **My favorite thing** about LinkedIn is the ability to use it as an online Rolodex with pictures.

Google Plus is like a trip to Starbucks. It's popular with many, but not everyone hangs out there. **My favorite thing** about it is yet to be discovered.

Pinterest is like an art festival. Some people are there for pure art, some are there to make money and lots of people are just lookers. "Eclectic" describes this channel. **My favorite thing** about Pinterest is the ability to save links and photos of things I'd like to buy. In addition, I use the quotes and travel ideas to create an online Vision Board.

Instagram is like a photo shop where everyone is showing their favorite pictures. **My favorite thing** about this channel is the quick visual updates from a select group of people.

YouTube is the marriage of a search engine with the entertainment factor of TV. **My favorite thing** about YouTube is the sheer volume of amazing videos.

Each of these varied environments has a set of expectations and a certain protocol. The rules aren't hard to learn. It's always wise to start simple, so let's get started with the ABCs.

ABCs of Netiquette

- A) Authenticity. Show you are approachable by completing your profile completely. It is important to use a photo of yourself in your profile rather than an avatar, logo or a picture of your pet.
- B) Be observant - especially when arriving on the scene of a new channel.
- C) Copyright Infringement is a very hot issue. Be mindful of the rules in this area.
- D) Discipline yourself to be consistent with managing your social media accounts.
- E) Engage in real conversation.
- F) Fun! Don't take yourself too seriously. Lighten up with your content and posts occasionally.
- G) Give and take, with the emphasis on give.
- H) Headshots. A professional photo is the way to put your best foot forward online. Think of it as your online clothing. First impressions are important.

- I) Infobesity is rampant. Share content for the sake of value, not just to be posting something.
- J) Just say no to the temptation to automate. The short cuts have some huge problems.
- K) Keep private conversations private. Recognize when it's time to move to a private space to continue a conversation.
- L) Listen for the rhythm and atmosphere of each channel and pace your posts accordingly. You will make a much better impression if you join the conversation in a gracious way.
- M) Monitor your accounts with the expectation you will see measurable progress in a reasonable period of time. But don't be obsessed with numbers.
- N) Negativity is toxic. Don't dump it online. It can come back to you in unforeseen ways. You reap what you sow - plant healthy seeds.
- O) Offer encouragement and support to others. Promote others whenever possible in a friendly way. Hold the syrup.
- P) Pick up the phone. Don't be lulled into thinking that private messaging and even emails can effectively communicate important messages. The phone is an important social channel!
- Q) Question your tribe. ASK what channel they want to connect on. ASK what you can do for them. Ask questions that open the door for others to help you. People who act like they know it all can be annoying.
- R) Respond to questions and comments. Two-way conversation is the goal of social media.
- S) Spam can take many forms. Exploiting your access to others is a sure way to lose people as fast as you win them. Be savvy about respecting boundaries.
- T) Too much information is a turn-off. Don't give too many details.
- U) Understanding and patience go a long way. When you see someone blatantly violating protocol, assume they need a mentor more than a critic.
- V) Venting should be minimal and any posts that sound like a rant should be tossed. Customer service complaints can generate a response but vitriolic remarks should be filtered out.

W) Weed out the time-stealers. Use management tools to discreetly filter your social media streams.

X) X out the cursing. Cussing is guaranteed to offend enough people that it's not worth it.

Y) YouTube is a powerful tool to deliver personal messages and connect on a deeper level. Use the unlisted and private settings where appropriate.

Z) Ze truth about grammar and spelling is that it's not the most important thing, but it does say something about you. Take time to double check your posts before submitting.

Email is a Social Tool

One would think that in more than 20 years of email availability that people would be proficient and observe best practices on a daily basis. Not so. A discussion of email etiquette is easily inspired by the biggest mistakes I see. What drives me crazy is that I see them almost every single day.

a) If you're going to forward an email, be clear that it's something the recipient is actually interested in. If it passes that test, then personalize it by adding a note. If you want to be sure they open it, remove the FW: from the subject line. I typically delete all emails that I see were forwarded to a group. I don't have enough time to review all my email, much less yours.

b) If you're mailing to a group, always use the blind carbon copy function (bcc) so you are not sharing private email addresses. Another huge consideration is it is prudent to disable the ability for people to select "reply all" either purposely or accidentally. I have seen more disasters from this tool than any other in email.

c) The cardinal rule pertaining to email as relational communication is NEVER fire off an email in haste when you're angry. I wouldn't even type a draft and save it for fear that it could get sent accidentally. Handwrite a note to vent some of the anger out of your system and then shred it. Wait 24 hours and then call the person. Following this advice can save your hide, so make note of it.

Your Personal Leadership

There are multitudes of things to learn as you move toward proficiency in Social Media but if you overlook basic manners, you've skipped a key ingredient for success. The record indicates that top leaders in any field are courteous, thoughtful people. My observation is that truly great people bring out the best in others. It is inflated egos or insecure people that make other people feel small.

When you approach Social Media with the awareness that it is a gateway to valuable connections and meaningful relationships with fascinating people, you will stand out like a beacon and reap untold benefits from the time you spend cultivating those relationships.

The Best is Yet to Come!

Let's Stay Connected,

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