Review of the Tools of Civility

As we begin the new year of 2016, I am starting my third year of writing this civility column. During the first year I provided you with the Nine Tools of Civil Behavior that our Civility Project had identified. This last year I gave you some illustrations of civil actions and additional attitudes that will help to enhance your civility. But as a trained educator and a current bridge teacher, I know that we not only need to practice what we have learned, we also have to review what we have learned. Therefore I want to start the year by reviewing these tools. To do this I want to remind you the arena for civil behavior is in all aspects of our communications with others.

1. Pay Attention- The best chance for every conversation to be civil is to begin by dropping everything that is about you and direct yourself to the other person. To use this tool one needs to prepare yourself for that selfless attention. You do this by focusing all your senses and body on the person that is speaking to you. First you need to let your ears hear what the person is saying. It is important to eliminate any noise or current distractions. Further you may have been busy with your own agenda and thoughts. These need to be put aside temporarily.

 Secondly with your eyes you need to look at the person. This shows that you are wanting to hear what the person has to say. Throughout the conversation you make appropriate gestures to indicate that you are following what is being said. You can also notice the nonverbal clues about what is being said by their body language which will help you to better comprehend.

1. Listen- With the first tool of paying attention you have prepared yourself to listen. Your goal is to hear every word that the other person is saying and to fully understand exactly what they are saying. This means that you cannot let your own thoughts enter in at this time. So often when someone begins to speak, we immediately begin our own self talk. We may believe that we are already aware and can turn our focus on our own agenda, we may not be interested in this topic and switch to one of our own, we may agree and want to get our own words out, or we may not agree and are already formulating our argument. All these behaviors eliminate the chance for civility because when you stop listening there is no longer a dialogue because you have ended the conversation with another. You miss some or all of what the person is saying. You hear only yourself. The other person will sense your absence and end the conversation in some way. You need to keep your mind clear and grasp the content of what is being said. You may interrupt only for a clarification. Once the person has finished you need to review what is said and recap to confirm your understanding.
2. Be inclusive- We know it is extremely difficult to keep out our own self talk. We have our own attitudes, beliefs, and interests. We probably are around people that share many of the same. Yet we are also confronted each day that differences exist. Each person looks different even identical twins. We have different races, religions, nationalities, etc. We have 13 people who are running for the presidential election as Republicans with different solutions to our nation’s problems.

 By taking an attitude of inclusiveness, we can find comfort in listening to an opinion that is not our own because it heightens are chance for civility. Our listening without bias gives us the opportunity to fully understand what someone else believes. Listening does imply acceptance that this is the person’s belief, but not agreement. When ones is listened to, the other will listen back. Listening to all ideas helps us live in a world of differences peacefully.

We will review the next three tools of civility next month.

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