The Last Three Tools of Civility

Our review has reminded us how much a part of civility is allowing yourself to hear what another is saying, but how you act and speak is as important as you want the person to truly hear you. As such let us look at the last three tools.

7. Apologize- One might be asking why is this an important tool of civility. I would say that to apologize sets a precedence in all your communications. We all want to always look our best at all times. Consequently when we error in some way by nature we do something to somehow make it go away or at least be minimally noticed. This means we never directly acknowledge what we did or said or try to minimize it in some way. Now there is a lie between us and we both know it. The listener has no trust and begins to disengage from truly hearing what is being said. The speaker remains focused on trying to put oneself in a positive light and not the substance of what he wants to say. BUT a true apology first reminds both that we are human and we all mistakes. Once we accept that we need to sincerely apologize, it become easier for the speaker to apologize when it is again necessary. The listener has seen that the speaker can admit a fault and will be inclined to do likewise. Both can now stay in the intended conversation.

8. Give Constructive Criticism- Since we are fallible, there are going to be times we forget or let our emotions block us from using the civility tools. Other times we are dealing with others uncivil behavior. Consequently we do need this tool. When we say nothing, the other person may not recognize or are in a minimizing situation. Ultimately we are encouraging an ever increasing civil dialogue in our own world and also in this whole world we live. It is important that we take a risk to be change agent and find a constructive way to discuss this with another. Often we are lucky. There are many individuals who do directly ask for honest feedback and mean it. They are to wanting to communicate in civil manner.

Timing is crucial. There are times that you can see that the person is simply unable to hear you and providing criticism would only make the situation worse. Often you may not have the needed time to have this conversation. There may be others present and you want to consider the individual’s feeling. When the time is right, identify the issue, start by stating what you heard, suggest a solution, and remain positive and supportive.

Let’s go back to Tool 4-Don’t Gossip. Someone has begun to tell you some gossip. Politely ask the person if you might interrupt for a moment. Then you might say “ I am hearing you talk about some mistakes someone else is making. I do know that we all do mistakes. I want to continue to give respect to this person as an individual which will allow for their own apology. It would be preferable to me that we move to another topic.” You may find other words.

9. Take Responsibility-While the first eight tools are specifically focused on communicating, Tool 9 is the cement that holds civility communication together. Now you have the tools, but it takes one’s full intention, responsibility, to use those tools daily in every conversation to the best of one’s ability and to treat them with respect, honesty, and dignity. The Door County Civility Project is suggesting one way to help you to accept that responsibility is to sign the Door County Civility Pledge. By doing so you have made a written commitment but also public to honor your decision to be civil. You can sign up online and obtain a pledge form at the Door County Community Foundation Office.

As you use these tools each day civility will become your way of life and more likely in our community and the world.

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