CIVILITY CORNER

PAY ATTENTION

The first tool of civility is Pay Attention. “Attention” says the Sergeant. Every recruit straightens their body, arms on their side and heads up and eyes directly at the officer. This military version of attention is one of obedience.

While this rigid body position does not fit any of our conversations, the lesson learned is that we need to initially adjust our body position to show that we are paying attention. Probably when someone wants to speak to us, our body is doing something else, like reading, making dinner, or working at a task. We need to stop everything that we are doing. Next we need to turn our bodies to be directly facing the speaker in a comfortable position with eyes on their face and an expression of interest on our face. We may smile, nod, and look interested while they complete what they wanted to say.

Secondly, we were in our own thoughts. Our mind was working hard to address our own tasks. Again we need to shut down all our own business, setting it aside for the time being. It may help to take a quiet long breathe saying to yourself, now I am leaving my thoughts in order to pay attention to the speaker. Your mind needs to remain in this mode until the person is done speaking.

Of course there are going to be times when you can do neither immediately. Rather than try to do both, you need to ask the speaker to give you the time you need because you are unable to give your full attention. You truly can only pay attention to one thing at a time.

When you are paying attention, you are ready to use Tool 2-Listen

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