



VISIONS OF CHARACTER
FEBRUARY 2012

DEFERENCE vs Rudeness...

limiting my freedom so I do not offend the tastes of those around me.

One of the most treasured freedoms Americans have is the freedom of speech. We have the right to express our opinions on any topic. This freedom is to be cherished and protected, but it does not give us the right disrespect or malign the rights of others, nor does it afford others the right to be rude or disrespectful of us.

Pause to reflect...

“Doing an injury puts you way below your enemy;

Revening one makes you but even with him;

Forgiving it sets you above him.”

Benjamin Franklin

As humans, we are all alike, and yet we are all different. Individual tastes, belief systems, cultural and environmental influences and family histories all vary in some way. These differences in themselves are neither right nor wrong ...they just are. It is the response to such differences which make them become character issues. This is where deference to others comes into play.

Deference does not mean giving up, or giving in. It does not mean becoming a doormat. Deference means a polite respect of the judgment, opinion or wishes of another person. It means knowing what is appropriate in each situation. We must show humility to learn from others, rather than expecting them to be carbon copies of ourselves. We must have persuasiveness to understand and clearly communicate with them. We must be able to discern and understand what is important, and what is trivial, in our differences to avoid needless conflict.

Deference means showing concern for others and being a “peacemaker” to establish stability—whether it is in the family, the workplace, or society in general. Life is a shared experience. Your home is shared with other family members. The community is shared by neighbors and the workplace shared with colleagues. Life is a series of interactions with others. Defer when necessary to live peacefully.

Bad manners are fast becoming the norm in today’s society. Television, movies and music encourage a lack of manners and disrespect for others in their words or storylines. Bullying of those that are “different” has become rampant. Grossness is permitted. Peer pressure encourages young people to physically and verbally attack others so that they can be “initiated” into a group. Then the “initiated” individual does the same thing to someone else and it becomes a vicious cycle. Society shrugs off rudeness. Obscene gestures, actions and words which were once considered demeaning and showed a lack of character of the offender, are now seen by some as terms of endearment or badges of acceptance.

Those who consider themselves to be civilized moral human beings do not condone this type of inappropriate behavior. If a person offends you, show deference to them by explaining how you feel, and

what negative vibrations this behavior sends to others. For matters that are important, take the offender aside and explain how their actions are creating problems, and that you would like to help them. Do not get into an argument. This will only intensify the problem. If the matter is trivial, but annoying, a sense of humor on your part can lighten things up.

No business is exempt from conflict. Employees display a mixed group of personalities, values, communication styles and agendas, which often lead to “drama” on the job. Unhealthy conflicts in the workplace are costly to the company and result in low job satisfaction, poor performance and poor customer service. Healthy conflict occurs when individuals work toward the same goal. New ideas spring from this type of conflict, hone strategies which raise productivity, and improve quality. Unhealthy conflict creates unresolved struggles in which individuals try to attain an advantage over one another.

Unfortunately, there are conflicts within families and other relationships much like those in the work environment. Make an effort to avoid disagreements which can become personal power struggles. Do not let attitudes of others dictate your responses. When you encounter conflict, base your response on the principles of good character and unite others in a shared vision of truth and justice. Face issues head on and deal with them before they tear your co-workers, family or community apart.

“Politeness and consideration for others is like investing pennies and getting dollars back.”
Thomas Sowell
American economist, professor, philosopher and author

Evaluate your Deference

- .do you pay attention to your surroundings so that you can avoid causing a disruption?**
- .do you reach out to others, or do you wait for them to reach out to you?**
- .are you more interested in arguing that in understanding?**
- .do you try to do what is right, or merely avoid conflict?**
- .do you practice the principles of good character such as forgiveness and tolerance in an effort to promote stability and unity?**
- .do you respect others even when they are wrong?**

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The Prattville-Autauga Character Coalition is a non-profit organization whose mission is to foster and promote good character in all walks of life through education and example. If you would like to make a monetary donation in support of this program, please call or email Boo Rogers, Executive Director, at pacharacter@prattvillechamber.com or (334) 365-7392 for more information.

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