

THE GOOD OIL ON GOOD MANNERS

***Good manners start at home.
That fact is undeniable.***

Quite simply, good manners are the lubricant of our social machinery. They help us to interact and connect in all areas of life with reduced friction and improved outcomes.

Good manners have become a casualty of today's lifestyle. The usual explanation is that we don't have the time for such pleasantries.

Of the many good things that can be said about teachers, perhaps one of the best is that they are constant role models of good manners. Careful to use *please* and *thank you* where appropriate, and to request rather than demand, they add finesse by using vocal tones that are respectful, while making eye contact to reveal interest and enjoyment. Considering the pressure most teachers are under, that's quite a feat. Well-mannered classrooms are invariably calmer, with the students more aware and sensitive to the needs of each other.

Good manners start at home. That fact is undeniable. Parents must prepare children for every step of the educational journey by equipping them with good manners. Role modelling good manners takes commitment and regular self-appraisal. Good manners don't suddenly disappear. They slowly slip away and are eroded by the stresses of daily living.

Parents, who are aware of good manners, tend to make sure they are well mannered to their children, friends, spouse, or partner. They expect good manners from their children and spend the time to develop this necessary habit.

Out in the community these people model good manners towards shop assistants, fellow road users and people in general. They are ready with a smile, a pleasant remark or a helping hand to someone in need.

Such people, be they adults or children, sound almost too good to be true and are certainly in short supply. However, there are some schools that are filled with such people and the effect is dramatic.

The children and teachers feel happy, safe, calm and cohesive. People talk about the school having "a nice feel." The teachers enjoy teaching and don't want to leave. The parents are relieved they have found a "good school." Everyone seems to be pulling in the same direction and the Principal encapsulates the whole experience by saying, "I've got great kids, great staff and great parents."

This remark would seem to indicate some kind of mutually supportive relationship between all three parties.

When I ask about the “nice feel,” the staff will talk about the virtues the school promotes, the parents will talk about the excellent teachers and the children will nearly always say, “Oh everyone’s just really nice to each other.”

I’m sure the reasons for the “feel” of such a school are varied and many, but I have no doubt that the foundation is good manners and all the respect, consideration and caring that that entails.

As an example of how we are abbreviating our manners today, please consider this:

Teacher: Good morning Terri. How are you?

Terri: Good.

This one-word answer by Terri would be the most common response offered by children today. It identifies and responds to only one element of the teacher’s question, that being, the teachers desire to know about Terri’s welfare.

Terri has failed to recognise the teachers concern, implicit in the question that made her ask in the first place. If she had, her answer would have been:

Terri: Good, thank you.

This answer is already shortened but does respond to the two elements of the teacher’s question. “Good,” meaning she’s feeling well and “thank you,” meaning I’m grateful for your concern.

I dare say that long ago the exchange would have sounded like this:

Teacher: Good morning Terri. How are you today?

Terri: Very well Mrs Jones and thank you for asking.

Far too formal and thank goodness we don’t talk in that way today, but you see my point.

The “Good, thank you,” version is perfectly acceptable but reduced to just, “Good,” without even taking the time to look at the teacher, makes Terri sound rude. It also allows Terri to avoid acknowledging the teachers interest in her as well as her welfare. The world may be getting faster but we will have made a big mistake if we allow that to mean there’s no time for good manners.

We must remember that the faster the parts of the social machinery turn, the better the lubricant must be.