

Feature article

Education of the heart



By Weelan Ho

When I was a child, a Dr Said, an Egyptian, lived near my house. He drove an old Jaguar and would sometimes take a stroll down the street with his wife for exercise. He was always neat and well groomed, wearing a shirt and a pair of Bermuda shorts with knee high socks and walking shoes. He would be very polite, smile at the neighbours and would occasionally bend down to pick up rubbish and sharp objects such as nails as he walked down the street. Dr Said's behaviour highlights some guiding principles for life that we all can learn from a gentleman of the older generation.

Personal image

Having a neat and well-groomed appearance creates a positive self image. It doesn't mean that we need to wear branded, expensive outfits; but wearing clean and appropriate attire shows self respect and an appreciation for good manners and social etiquette. Our public behaviour is an extension of our personal (including work) behaviour, and vice versa.

This may be an extreme example, but a news article once reported a fight between two groups of people from two different cultural backgrounds. While other factors may have contributed to the conflict, the straw that broke the camel's back was when one of the parties was offended by the attire of the other. This group of men often sat around playing card games without their shirts on in public areas because of the hot weather. This was an eye sore and was considered bad manners within the cultural context of that region, and some people took offence of this inconsiderate behaviour. We should be mindful of other people's sensitivities and respect their culture. If you want to bare your top and go without a shirt, do so in your private domain, i.e. in your own room. Even the dining room and family lounge can be thought of as public domains within your home.

It is important to remember that conduct and behaviour convey a certain message about us. Would you recruit someone who is insensitive, inconsiderate, has no self respect and a poor image to work for you? I think the answer is clearly NO.



Good manners count

A smile, and a hello here and there, worked wonders. Everyone liked Dr. Said. Being polite is definitely an asset. We develop good manners from childhood and we learn social skills from the people around. Positive role models influence our social behaviour and this ultimately shapes our behaviour during adulthood. But it is never too late to make a difference; the key lies in one's self awareness of one's behaviour and the willingness to change.

Education of the heart

Dr Said saw it as everyone's civic duty to keep the environment clean and safe. Sharp objects were dangerous for children or teenagers who played outside. Throwing rubbish in the street was not the norm. Dr Said's gestures taught us to be considerate and to respect the public domain and the people in it.

Despite the passing of time, even after so many years, the impression Dr Said made on me never diminish. What he taught us through his actions was the education of the heart, and that education must begin from home and be reinforced through continuous encouragement of the same good behaviour in schools.

Positive organizational culture can be fostered in the same way – through consistent actions of role models, particularly from the people we report to, for they set the tone. This results in consistent behaviour from all team members and will ultimately form the desired work culture and over a period become a natural part of us.

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