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June 1, 2006

## **Rudeness Reveals Character**

by Ken Embley, CPPA

I have a difficult time dealing with rude people. Moreover, when I find myself being rude, usually in the form of a sarcastic remark, I eventually retreat; feel guilty as heck and resolute to correct that flaw in my character—you got it, this article is my penance.

In the April 14 USA Today Business Section, the cover story line was CEOs vouch for **Waiter Rule**: Watch how people treat staff, and subtitle—Rudeness to service workers reveals a lot about character. The point of the article—watch out for people who have a situational value system, who can turn the charm on and off depending on the status of the person they are interacting with. Be especially wary of those who are rude to people perceived to be in subordinate roles.

The person who first thought of the **waiter rule** is Raytheon CEO Bill Swanson who wrote a booklet of 33 short leadership observations called Swanson's Unwritten Rules of Management.

Among those 33 rules is only one that Swanson says never fails, and of course, that one rule is the **waiter rule**:

**"A person, who is nice to you but rude to the waiter, or to others, is not a nice person."**

For some reason, we, meaning many of us, find it acceptable to be rude and fail to recognize that this rudeness points directly to our own character flaws—flaws that may make it difficult to succeed as a manager or as a leader.

Ah, but you say, I am not a rude person. Well, maybe or maybe not. Do any of the following waiter rule situations apply?

- You are at a youth baseball game and the umpire calls "strike three" and you hear a parent yell, "Come-on Blue—that's a terrible call!" The person yelling seems satisfied with their powers of observation and pronouncement.
- You are at a retail outlet waiting in line with other patrons. A new checkout stand opens and someone shouts "Break's over—it's about time!" The patrons seem to take some joy in getting a little chuckle at the expense of the person opening the new checkout stand.

When we are rude to people we believe to be in subordinate roles we tend to place blame, ridicule, be sarcastic, and fail to take responsibility. This is a character flaw—a flaw that makes us a part of the problem and not a part of the solution and this, in turn, is a character flaw that makes it difficult to succeed as a manager or a leader.

Remember, I said this article is my penance. Okay—you got it, mine is the baseball example. I consider myself a "waiter rule nice person," so why do I feel I have the right to yell, "That's a terrible call" in front of 20 nine-year-old players, their parents, friends and, of course, the umpire who is all of 14 years of age.

Well, the good news is that I know that I was rude and because of this knowledge, I can fix the



problem, and in the process, strengthen my character, and develop my abilities to be a good manager and leader.

Rudeness does reveal flaws in our character—but **recognition of rude behavior can be a step in the development of character**. My vow is to be that nice person, a person that is in tune with the wisdom of the **waiter rule**.

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