

## MANNERS MAKETH MAN

I was a bit taken aback this week when my receptionist handed in her resignation with immediate effect, after being offered a lecturing job at a new and one would have thought upcoming university in town. Make no mistake, I was delighted that this particular young lady has been offered the position, if a little surprised considering her lack of experience. For a long time HRMC has had a policy of taking on graduates in our business while they wait to find better jobs and they are usually snapped up fairly quickly – it is a well known fact that it is better to conduct a job search while you are employed since candidates who are currently working are more desirable than those who are unemployed. The result is that we manage to help more graduates find work even though it results in a high turnover of staff – but on the upside again we always have amazingly well qualified people manning our reception.

So the leaving per se was not the problem – it was the manner in which she was expected to expedite it. Apparently the Human Resources Manager at Limkokwing had asked her to start next week, even though she knew very well that her potential employee was currently in full time employment. She was also told that it was a limited time offer – miss it and miss out. Basically, walk out on your employer with no real notice,, was the message given - no hand over period to her replacement, never mind giving the employer any time to even find one, since small companies like HRMC don't have a succession plan in place for staff leaving at a moment's notice.! And the principle reason for the undue haste was lack of pre-planning on the university's behalf – basically they're opening next week come hell or high water and they have to fill their staff quota before then.

Anyway that's not the real story here. It's about how some professionals send inappropriate messages and set really bad examples when they are supposed to be role models. To this graduate the message is not to worry about integrity or loyalty – all's fair in love, war and business, off with the old, on with the new and to hell with the consequences. Yet I wonder if the employees at that University are encouraged to just up sticks and leave when they find a new job...I bet you they are not.

It seems to me that we're talking about simple good manners here. Good manners and behaving honourably in business, just as in life, are critical and are things which we should have grown up with. Like most things these attributes are most readily acquired in a window of time in our early childhood. That is when children absorb and practice interpersonal behaviours with the help of good role models and appropriate guidance. And we need those people skills – they are what define us as civilised individuals, this ability to inter-react and inter-relate with consideration for others.

This is what manners are. With the right environment this behaviour and code of conduct is built upon during adolescence and compounds to form a strong foundation for interpersonal relationships, both business and private, throughout life. But what if the people we have in our organisations do not share this upbringing? Are they likely to behave as this HR Manager did by encouraging new recruits to disrespect their current employers and basically shaft them?

So here's the question - are much of our performance and customer service problems the result of poor basic manners and should we be training our employees in matters of politeness and business etiquette instead of assuming that they learned these social skills at an early age, just as we ourselves did? And the answer is – when in doubt, don't assume – check!

Some people think that courtesy is common sense, but what was once considered common sense is not so common anymore. According to Jacqueline Whitmore, an expert in business protocol and all else that that entails, "To get ahead in today's competitive world of business, we have to know how to play the game." And to excel in any game, we must know the rules. Etiquette is a set of rules and guidelines that make our personal and professional relationships more harmonious, productive, manageable, and meaningful. Raw talent, a good education, and technical skills are not enough to get ahead. Business etiquette is part of the "soft skill" set that separates the leaders from the left behind.

If we aren't aware of business etiquette and what it takes to attract and retain customers or to get along with co-workers, we may be damaging valuable business relationships or tarnishing our reputation without realizing it. There are some rules in business that don't have to be written and one of them is don't act like a dog cos otherwise you will eventually get bitten.

So to this poorly-guided HR manager who thinks it's okay to act in this cavalier and inconsiderate manner and encourages others to do the same, I say take yourself off to life's finishing school where good manners are taught. It certainly makes you question what this university will be teaching its undergraduates about business ethics if this is how they interpret and practise their own - with no integrity, manners, or any concept of fair play!

In fact the entire episode calls into question the credentials of this learning centre – the placing of inexperienced staff in positions where they are required to pass that inexperience on to others, their clear lack of planning and organisation in recruitment and administration and their apparent ignorance of business niceties and public relations. This is the educational equivalent of fast food – a quick snack for those hungry for knowledge, instead of a proper 3-course meal!

