

# PLEASE AND THANK YOU

By: Robert Sher

After working out at a health club many years ago, I smiled at an elderly gentlemen and said “excuse me” so I could get into my locker without bumping into him. Later that morning he stopped me and asked me if my mother was alive. I was a bit startled by the question, but I answered “no.”

The man told me that if she were alive, he would have told me to call her and thank her for teaching me to be polite.

“I’m here every day at the same locker,” he said. “People run past me and no one ever even stops to say excuse me.”

I use this story in my own day-to-day Executive Coaching role to explain how important it is to use good manners in managing employees. It took minimal effort to smile at a kind man and even less to say “excuse me” so I could pass him without being rude.

Would you have ignored this man? Do you say “please” to a manager who reports to you before asking him to complete a budget for next year? Do you express gratitude for jobs well done or are you a just a task master who forgets simple manners when managing people?

I’ve heard many excuses from managers who lack manners and the ability to offer any praise for good work. Some worry that praise or basic kindness might encourage employees to ask for pay raises. Others spend more time on their computers, in meetings, typing emails on Blackberries and at lunch with cell phones glued to their ears than with engaging in meaningful conversations with people.

Some are so focused on the bottom line they forget to look others in the eye, open their doors to their offices, or even say “good morning” to their staff.

This is not acceptable so won’t you please join me in 2008 and ring in the New Year on a high road? Let’s bring good, old-fashioned manners back into the boardroom. Here’s a quick cheat sheet to get you started:

- 1) Memorize – and use – these words in every conversation: **Please and thank you.**
- 2) Smile – it takes fewer muscles to smile than it does to frown. It makes you more attractive, more approachable and easier to please.
- 3) Be positive. Walk around the office, greet your employees in the morning and say good night at quitting time.
- 4) Turn off your cell phone when you are in a meeting or at lunch. Do not text messages while having a conversation with another person.
- 5) Try doing one random act of kindness every day for an unsuspecting employee. (Stop and chat with the mail clerk; ask the security guard about his children; tell your administrative assistant to take an extra half hour for lunch one day.)

Many of you may already know my favorite expression: “A fish rots from the top down.” If you are stinky, your employees will be stinky, but, if you are polite, they will follow your lead, be polite and ultimately feel good at work. What happens when employees feel good at work? They are happy and, therefore, produce quality work.

Using good manners is – and always has been – a win-win for everybody.

*Robert Sher, CPA, is a Certified Executive Coach. Formerly CFO and partner for Schostak Brothers & Company, he now serves on the West Bloomfield Township Board of Trustees and is Treasurer of the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants Foundation. His Email address is: [info@bobsher.com](mailto:info@bobsher.com).*