

Let Golden Rule guide us

Bernie Patterson, For USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin

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Most of us know the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do to you.

Many of us follow it. But, I fear, fewer are compelled to do so in recent times. More, it seems, are emboldened to be rude or crude, to perpetuate anger rather than kindness. Of course, there are many issues in our society on which reasonable people can and do disagree.

But it is my hope the recent trend toward rudeness and vulgarity in our personal relationships and public discourse will change. There are solid reasons it should, from both a personal and professional perspective.

Just because someone has a right to say something, does not mean it's the right thing to say. Consider the grandmother litmus test: Would you say or do it if she was watching?

"Our character is defined by what we choose to do when we think no one is looking." So wrote H. Jackson Brown, Jr., in *Life's Little Instruction Book*. This New York Times best seller was originally written as a gift to the author's son as he departed for college.

As long as we need to share this earth, we might as well find ways to listen and talk to each other respectfully. We also must talk through differences civilly.

Late last year, several faculty and staff participated in a panel discussion as part of UW-Stevens Point's Civil Discourse Initiative. A capacity crowd attended, including many members from the community. We believe it is important to examine, refine and practice civil discourse principles when talking about controversial topics.

As moderator Christopher Cirimo, dean of our College of Letters and Science, said: "The capacity to engage in fruitful and respectful dialog with those who disagree with us is essential to any cooperative effort, from the workplace all the way up to the highest levels of government."

These skills and abilities to civilly discuss are exactly what higher education needs to cultivate. They are needed on a daily basis in life. They're needed in the workplace. They're needed in our communities. They're needed to navigate business challenges and family dynamics. Critical thinking and effective communication skills are essential in any career. These include listening, being open to ideas and thoughts of others, trying new ways.



To be successful as individuals and as communities, we need to bridge racial, religious, ethnic, political and gender divides. We need to work with each other. We need to get along. Together, we can tackle challenges better than if we are divided. A little kindness goes a long way.

It's human nature to seek out others like ourselves. After all, we have been doing that since humankind banded together as gatherers centuries ago. I challenge us today to talk to someone who:

- comes from a place different from where we grew up
- looks different than we do
- sounds different than we do
- has a different worldview than we have

We just may discover we are more alike than we might expect.

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