

Are You a Good Responder?

Why responding is good etiquette

E-mails, voicemails, invitations; we all get them for one reason or another. Receiving these little overtures of communication is easy: you open you listen, you read. The challenging part for many seems to be what action is taken afterwards. Although there are many things that can and do go wrong with respect to technology and the postal system, more times than not these methods of communication get through just fine. Yet over and over again I see people who simply don't respond, for reasons only they know. So what's the big deal about that? Well the most obvious reason is if someone makes an effort to reach out to another or invite them to a gathering the least we can do as considerate people is to acknowledge those efforts. Surprisingly enough that takes very little time and energy yet doesn't happen as often as it should.

There is no doubt that we are all very busy with work, family and life. But the single most important question relative to this topic is "are we too busy to be courteous and considerate to others?" Recently I was behind a young woman in the drive-thru at a very popular fast food establishment. My window was down as I sat ready to place my order. I listened to how she responded to the employee coming through the loudspeaker and was disappointed to hear how she was communicating with him. She was abrupt and unfriendly as she spoke her order. Upon receiving her bag she waited for a moment just ahead of the window and then quickly pulled into a parking spot where she got out of her car and stomped into the restaurant. I thought to myself, poor people, here she comes! It was then I tried to give her the benefit of the doubt. Maybe she was having a bad day, right? Sure I guess that's a possibility. Yet the person whom she had just communicated with wasn't to blame for her bad day. It was then the thought crossed my mind that being nice to others really doesn't take much effort at all and it certainly leaves one with a better feeling than the alternative.

Through the navigable journey we call life there are choices we all must make. Being a good responder is a choice, not a requirement, but it certainly instills a good feeling when a positive response is received versus a negative one or worse none at all.

So before we open, listen and read we should think about how we are going to respond. Generally speaking the most appropriate action would be to send a short note back via email, pick up the phone and return the call or acknowledge the received invitation. The choice to respond or not is ours and it is fleeting but the impression left over as a result of our actions can last a lot longer.

Here are three suggestions on how to be a good responder:

1. When an e-mail is received, take a few seconds to acknowledge it and if need be, we should indicate that we'll follow up later when time allows.
2. When we receive a voicemail that requests a response, return the call within 48 hours or drop that person an email.
3. When we receive an invitation to a gathering, whether it's a work related function or personal let the organizer know of our plans to attend or not. Remember, if someone is kind enough to invite us to something it's because they want us there. Give them an answer, one way or the other. Doing so will send a message that we appreciate being included and value the time they spent doing so.

Remember, a lack of communication is much worse than providing an answer someone may not want to hear. We should all strive to be good responders and as a result take pride in our efforts to treat others the way we all would like to be treated.

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