

June 1, 2025

Edmund Burke, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Facebook on Manners.

All, my plan for the column was to write about manners. I got thinking about manners while listening to something on Facebook. A somewhat stuffy guy talking about Edmund Burke and his theory on manners. The bottom line of the theory is that manners are important. [Note: Edmund Burke made his mark as a philosopher and politician during a lifespan that stretched from 1729 through 1797. Hence, he does not post on Facebook very often, relying on others to do so on his behalf.]

Burke on Manners...

An AI/Google-Romp provides insight into what he regarded manners to be per a modern analysis:

Manners are clearly not the same as laws. They are generally unwritten (unless we are talking about ritual), and they lack the regular, codified sanctions that support institutes and decrees. However, they have a similar function; in our small social communities and informal relationships they lay down expectations of behavior that facilitate the smooth-running and therefore expedite the purpose of these various bodies from the nuclear family to the shopping mall. These very circumstances which make sense of our manners mean that they cannot be constituted and implemented like laws and they should not; but we commit a serious mistake if we allow the institutionalized power of the latter to diminish our respect for the former. It is the very superficial weakness of manners that actually constitutes their crucial importance in our lives.

The Romp continues.

Burke points out, manners are always with us and, in their nature, they are quickly adaptable to changing circumstances in a way that written laws can never be, however firm or enthusiastic the backing for those laws might be. The very strength of manners lies in the fact that they are unwritten; they work "by a constant, steady, uniform, insensible operation, like that of the air we breathe in."

Are Manners Passé?

It would be unfortunate if manners were simply inconvenient relics of the past that we apply begrudgingly. It would be even more unfortunate if knowledge of manners was regarded as a mark of superiority over someone who may not be familiar with what constitutes manners. To belittle someone simply because they may not know a rule that you think is important is wrong.

Eleanor Roosevelt and Manners...

On January 1, 1962, Eleanor Roosevelt's *Book of Common-Sense Etiquette** was published. She certainly was someone who knew which fork to use having been brought up in a rarefied aristocratic atmosphere. But, she did not dwell on it in evaluating others. An AI/Google-Romp provided the following.

Mrs. Roosevelt had strong views on the importance of manners and etiquette. She believed that good manners were not simply about adhering to rigid social rules, but rather about cultivating genuine kindness and consideration for others.

Here's a summary of Eleanor Roosevelt's perspective on manners.

Eleanor Roosevelt's Core Principles.

Kindness as the Foundation: Roosevelt believed that the true basis of good manners was kindness. If one genuinely intends to be kind, the appropriate manners will naturally follow.

Consideration for Others: She emphasized that good manners were about approaching all social situations with consideration for others, striving to make them feel comfortable and respected.

Flexibility over Rigid Rules: While acknowledging the importance of etiquette, Roosevelt also stressed the need for flexibility. She famously advised, "If ever you find yourself in a situation in which following a formal rule would be manifestly unkind, forget it, and be kind instead".

Good Manners as a Sign of Good Will: Roosevelt saw good manners as a reflection of sincere good will and a way of being oneself, rather than a display of artificial formality.

Broader Implications of Manners...

Promoting Civil and Productive Relationships: Roosevelt believed that thoughtful and civil behavior were essential for fostering peaceful and productive relationships, both personally and professionally.

American Ambassadors of Democracy: She felt that good manners were important for all Americans, especially when traveling abroad, as they served as ambassadors for their country and its values of democracy.

In Essence: Eleanor Roosevelt's philosophy on manners was rooted in the idea that genuine kindness and consideration for others are more important than strict adherence to formal rules. She saw good manners as a means of promoting positive social interactions and reflecting well on both individuals and their nation.

What Eleanor Roosevelt Taught Me...

I learned something very interesting about etiquette when I had the opportunity to spend several hours with Mrs. Roosevelt at her home at 55 E. 74th St. in New York City. I had an appointment and she was expecting me. As a matter-of-fact she answered the door, which I thought was surprising. I figured there would be the maid to handle that.

The first thing she said to me was, "I'm Eleanor Roosevelt and you must be Kenneth." Then she gestured to the closet to show me where I should hang up my coat. That kind of surprised me because I figured there would be some person to take my coat from me and then hang it up. Just like in those movies where there are butlers and maids. Well there was neither, So I hung up my coat. Then we sat in the living room and talked for quite a while.

When I mentioned to someone that I had hung up my own coat I was informed that that is the right etiquette when a man comes to a woman's home and visits. She is not going to be hanging up your coat. That is probably the only etiquette lesson that I will remember until my last breath.

Bad Manners, Poor Taste to Eliminate the Penny...

It's official. The mint is no longer producing pennies because it costs more than a penny to produce a penny. So what? The Lincoln penny is more than a penny. It is a goodwill ambassador in many senses. It is recognized all over the world. It is not scorned. In another unique sense it is also a retail goodwill ambassador.

Think about those little bowls of pennies that you will find just about every cash register in the country when you pay cash. If the cost of something is \$4.52, it is very thoughtful of the merchant to have a bowl of pennies available so that if you are spending a five dollar bill you will get \$0.50 back by dipping into the penny bowl for two pennies. This is a goodwill gesture from the merchant to the customer. It eases commerce.

There is no legitimate reason to get rid of it except meanness because it will drive up costs to the nearest nickel. That may not sound like much but penny here and a penny there and pretty soon you're talking about real money. NOT CRYPTO COINS.

Ken

*Roosevelt, Eleanor, 1884-1962. *Book of common sense etiquette*. New York, Macmillan, 1962.