

WHEN IS IT OKAY TO “BRUSH SOMEONE OFF”?

BY LORRAINE RINKER 2008

I recently attended a local event with over 400 other people. I ran into quite a few people I knew, some of whom I had recently seen, others I had not seen in a very long time, and many I met for the first time.

Two things struck me. One, the total strangers I met who shared their personal stories with me, like Chris’s story of how he overcame the most adverse conditions in life and is now the happiest he could ever imagine. Stories like those shared by Margaret and Ed whose longevity created words of wisdom they were kind enough to pass on to me - - a total stranger. The second thing that struck me? The people who knew me and brushed me off.

Maybe I’ve become over-sensitive to the lack of etiquette, maybe it’s just me. I’ve concentrated my efforts on being “present” and focused with each person I engage in conversation with whether it’s the first and only time, or the thousandth time – nurturing and caring for relationships that I consider to be of value. Maybe I just expect

too much of the people I associate with. Maybe the people I thought were “givers” are actually “takers” in “giver’s clothing”.

But, when people can’t even find the time to make eye contact with you while speaking your name - - who obviously have something more important to do than to focus for a moment on you, well – it made me think. I brushed off their “brushing me off” with grace - - no one was the wiser that I even noticed. But, in the back of my mind – it made me wonder – have I done that to others? Have I been in such a

hurry to get what I want that I passed over and politely ignored those who didn’t matter to me at the time? Have there been times when I’ve been so focused on “me” that others were made to feel small so that I could feel big?

Somebody slap me if I have! I ask my friends and colleagues to call me on it and help me face it if it happens because my intention is to NOT be one of those people.

Many things can drive that kind of behavior. Youth and inexperience, ego-centricity, over confidence, lack of confidence, fear, angst, and so on. There is so much uncertainty today, so why wouldn’t people be a bit on edge. Still, is that cause for bad manners? Today, being aloof or “better than others”, does not come across as “mysterious or intriguing”, it comes across as arrogance and snobbery.

I’m not saying you need to remember every single person who has helped you along the way and go outside of your way to be congenial and friendly. I’m talking about plain good manners. Simple things like looking someone square in the eye and smiling



sincerely when saying “hello”. I’m talking about taking someone’s hand in a firm (not bone-crushing or wishy-washy-fishy) handshake of welcome. I’m talking about really caring about the other person’s response when you ask “how’s it going?”

So, when is it okay to “brush someone off”? Never. Particularly when they least deserve it. You get as good as you give - - and what goes around comes around. Never ever forget that. Smile, keep moving, and don’t ever stop caring about others.