

Recession gives rise to office rage

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Everybody has noticed it - the effect of the recession on the quality of manners around the workplace. For the first time, I am hearing the term 'Office Rage'.

Bad manners around the office are nothing new, of course. But since the economic downturn, there has been a perceptible increase in irritating behaviour and a new aggressiveness, as though normal good manners are identified as some kind of expendable luxury. Notice the growing tendency to dismiss a perfectly reasonable request because 'I haven't got time' - an expression to avoid in any case as it's not conducive to co-operation among colleagues or a happy workplace atmosphere.

If we are indeed living in a time of world economic crisis, then we might remember Ernest Hemingway's elegant phrase 'grace under pressure' as the definition of courage. It reflects a refusal to be dictated by fear.

Behind all that macho posturing, these heightened bad manners at work are rooted in fear. Clients with an eye for philosophy may detect the fear-element, and simply turn away, for fear can kill any sale. But plenty of others will simply observe that good manners create bonds, open doors, and ultimately command respect. Bad manners do the opposite.

I witnessed a significant case of this just recently last week on my last visit to the UAE, when I gave a presentation to the HR staff at one of the longer-established golf clubs. I knew that the two top directors had conflicting ideas about the running of the club.

One of them was very much a golfer's golfer, interested only in the upkeep of the fairways and greens, with the entertainment facilities as secondary. The other saw it the other way round - chiefly as a lucrative venue for conferences, exhibitions and banquets, with a few golf-holes tacked on.

For years, they had agreed to differ about this, but on my recent visit, following a string of cancellations from conference clients due to the credit crunch, the increased tension between the two of them was all too visible and staff morale was suffering as a result.

All manner of aggressive emails were being exchanged, and they only just held back from snapping at each other in public.

Waiting in reception for my transport, I chatted to the catering manager, who confided that he was seriously worried about this new bad atmosphere that was so obvious to everyone (as it certainly was to me). The two directors seemed to have forgotten that the golfing world is traditionally identified with a particular brand of decorum, almost like a branch of chivalry. And when you're hosting international events, good manners and a pleasant atmosphere can make the whole difference to your reputation all over the world.

I suggested that he might find a moment to mention this to them himself - after all, as catering manager, he would carry some weight. I just hope that he did!

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