

The Courteous and the Clueless

Category Family Series

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The time was 8:00 PM and the mall was packed as expected with weekend shoppers. Teenagers roamed in groups marching from one interesting store to another; families walked at a leisurely pace as they took in the sights and sounds all around them; and the weekend shopping warriors, the lone shoppers on a mission, navigated the walkways with focus. It was a typical weekend summer night and everything seemed to be going rather fine.

The food court was packed as usual. This section of the mall was especially popular with teens and families with young children and toddlers. The array of eateries and food service vendors provided a forum for social gathering and an opportunity for a break to satisfy the palate.

At one end of the food court, a family of four was settling around one of the tables preparing to enjoy a meal. The mother placed her tray gently on the table as her two young daughters took their seats eager to dig into their fast food dinner. Their father was not far behind, walking slowly as he balanced a tray of large cups of drinks for everyone.

About sixty feet away, another family (of five) was already enjoying their dinner. Two young boys, aged ten and twelve, were digging into their favorite cheeseburger with fries, while their older teenage sister was enjoying a large supreme pizza with their parents. Their dinner was flanked by large cups of drinks for everyone as well.

As the two families enjoyed their informal social gathering, unaware of each other, they recalled some of their activities of the day (at the mall) and of the week in general. From time to time the mother of the two girls would instruct her daughters to keep their voices down when they became engrossed in their usual discourse and playful banter. The father would reinforce her wife's actions with a firm look in the direction of the girls.

Before long the crowd had thinned at the food court. It was getting late and all the food service vendors were closed. A mall janitor made his way to each table informing diners politely that the food court would be closing within fifteen minutes. He, along with his crew of two, proceeded to clean the empty tables that were recently vacated.

Within the next half hour, the food court was virtually empty. Everyone had left with the exception of the two families still consumed in their engaging discourse. They seemed to be oblivious to the time and to the situation around them. The mall janitors continued their job hoping that the two families would leave soon.

And then, as if on cue, the young girl (one of the family of four) observed the unfolding situation and promptly said, "Hey Mom, Dad, the mall is closing. We have to leave!"

The girl's parents looked around and promptly stood up in agreement. And then, without further thought, the four systematically cleared their table, cleaned the mess they had created, and took their trays to the tray receptacle. As they walked past one of the janitors, now headed toward their vacant table, the two girls said in unison, "Thank you."

Their parents echoed their sentiment as well, as the janitor acknowledged them with a smile.

The family of five noticed the family of four leaving and suddenly realized that they were the only ones left in the food court. The father promptly stood up followed by the mother and the three kids.

"Come on. Let's go," said the father.

The five quickly proceeded out of the food court leaving an island of a mess behind them. They walked past another one of the janitors without uttering a word. The two boys were still engaged in a childish dialogue, while the teenage daughter restored her music player earphones. The two parents walked steadily behind them carrying three bags of purchases from earlier in the evening.

Two of the three janitors converged on the mess and began the last cleanup of the evening. They looked at each other and could only shake their heads. One of them said to the other, "There you go. There are the courteous and there are the clueless!"

Common Courtesy

Generally accepted manners or due consideration afforded someone else as a matter of normal behavior.

Common courtesy is a simple form of demonstrating respect for other people—especially people that you do not know. When you demonstrate common courtesy, it always reflects positively on you—always. It may even influence someone else in a strong and positive way. It indicates your sense of respect, your level of awareness, and your depth of knowledge—regarding basic civility.

About the Author



Niyi Taiwo is the founder of EKTIMIS and the lead editor for the EKTIMIS eLibrary articles. He is the author of several books, including the EKTIMIS Top Ten Laws series. He is a continuous improvement expert with over 21 years of industry experience – operational, management and consulting. He holds an undergraduate degree from WPI and a master's degree from RPI. He is a certified Lean Expert and an ASQ-certified Six Sigma Black Belt.