

z/Bottom Line



ERIC L. VAUGHAN

Common Courtesy

Parents strive for the best for their children, and in most households, that extends to a litany of manners imposed early on that make no sense to the kid who just wants to be a kid. Sit up straight; don't talk with your mouth full; say please and thank you. As evolved adults, we realize these "constraints on our creativity" were our parents' attempts at helping us learn how to play nice with others, employing respect and civility in what would otherwise be a chaotic world. And for that, we thank *them*.

But in graduating from Life's Rules 101, these common-sense approaches that make person-to-person relationships more trustworthy and cooperative appear to have skipped over a section that was equally important. Our parents (or mentors, advisors, teachers, and managers) neglected to impart that it was also vital to extend these efforts to the world of business.

It has become too commonplace for people in business to disregard even common courtesies to the point they appear as deliberate discourtesies. Something has happened over the years to produce a "class" system where manners are important only if the relationship is directly pointing to the bottom line.

In the mainframe industry, we are many groups all intertwined with IBMers, vendors, customers, and partners. Yet even though these are all different roles, they still deserve the same level of respect and courtesy that Mom wagged her finger about. But the reality is far from this standard, particularly when the encounter isn't with an existing or prospective customer.

A view has developed through the years that anybody who doesn't fall into the customer category merely wants something from you, and because of that, manners don't apply. This has given way to almost a standard operating procedure of engaging the other party for questions/proof of concepts/information/research/agreements, and then simply vanishing in terms of responding. This is illustrated with the all too common and seemingly accepted practices of not returning phone calls, e-mails, and missing agreed upon appointments.

The tragic part of this is the excuse that has been offered—it's just business, not personal.

Business is about the pursuit of a goal, but when the goal is at the expense of the inter-personal encounters that pave the road, as a society, we've lost something. And it's time to restore some order.

Our company recently took an unprecedented (for us)

step in one instance. A customer we've serviced and partnered with for more than 10 years had, over the last year, adopted this type of relationship management. We made several attempts to resolve the issue, but when there was seemingly no response to our pleas to fix the relationship, we decided to end it. As in many relationships, both parties have to regard the care and feeding process; one side can't do it alone. In this case, what seemed like disrespect was no longer an acceptable way of doing business.

But with this customer, the most remarkable thing happened. The gravity of the decision caused them to take notice, and they came to us asking for a conversation. After a lengthy discussion, they apologized and spent a good deal of time explaining to us their current challenges, and how they had impacted their responsiveness. They didn't offer this as an excuse, and in the end, they asked us to please consider working together.

This was an easy decision—communication was all we were seeking in the first place. We welcomed the relationship back with open arms. Even more remarkable is the way this relationship has now taken on a new meaning to both sides—stronger and more involved, as partners should be. As what happens often with such encounters, both of us now see this as a more important and meaningful relationship that can be trusted.

We are all partners in our world of mainframe business, regardless of the "side" of the relationship. The call here is for CIOs to instill this throughout their organizations. It's time to put an end to the notion that just because an interaction is with a vendor or partner, the rules of engagement are different. Even though they may not be writing checks to your organization, they potentially could play an important role. That's why you've engaged them to start with. And steps must be taken to ensure they don't receive any less courtesy than an important customer.

As with many facets of life, the golden rule applies here as well. And if nothing else, let's do it to make Mom proud. And that's z/Bottom Line. **Z**

About the Author

Eric L. Vaughan is president and CEO of illustro Systems International, LLC. He has more than 20 years of experience in the IT industry and is leading illustro in its focus on helping IT executives extend and enhance their existing investments.
Voice: 214-800-8900 • e-Mail: evaughan@illustro.com