

Civility – in the Legal Community, and on the World Stage

April is an interesting month. We start off with April Fool's Day; in some instances, people will be the subject of pranks and jokes, while for others it is just another day. It is also the month for Passover, Easter and Earth Day, to mention a few in no particular order. We also cannot forget that it is Mint Julep Month and National Grilled Cheese Month.

In Louisville, though, as I learned when I moved here, it is the prelude to the Kentucky Derby. As we approach the first weekend in May, there are many events that focus on the biggest thing to happen in Louisville every year.

I have learned that there are more than seventy Derby events, including the Parade, the Mini-Marathon and Marathon, Steamboat Race, and of course, Thunder over Louisville. These events spotlight Louisville, its residents and the community.

We welcome visitors, both human and equine, from around the world. As such, Derby and its related events produce an economic benefit to the community in excess of \$400 million dollars. Hotels and restaurants are booked, hats and fascinators are in demand, and mint julep cups are a hot souvenir for many.

Why am I going on and on about the Derby? Because it gives us, as a community, the opportunity to showcase ourselves and our city; to be on our best behavior and welcome these many visitors to Louisville. Nothing makes a worse impression than a rude or unhelpful resident. Family members who recently visited several cities came back with both horror stories and surprises.

A visit to Disney World in Orlando produced mixed results; Disney employees were great but Orlando residents in restaurants and hotels seemed not to care if the food was good or the hotel was satisfactory. On the other hand, a discussion about a visit to Paris during the Olympics was infused with comments about how nice the hotel personnel were and how the service staff in restaurants were so accommodating. Who do we want to be?

As attorneys, we serve our clients according to their needs and their cases. We lose nothing and gain so much more with kindness, compassion and empathy. Our profession at times requires those traits. Dealing with a victim of a crime or an injury. Meeting with a family that has lost a mother, father, spouse or other loved one. Yet so many times we are faced with hostility, rudeness and a lack of civility.

We all can remember times when we had to be the one that conceded a point in order to gain something for our client in a negotiation. We have fought when necessary and said I am sorry where appropriate.

Civility is an interesting concept. It is defined as formal politeness and courtesy in behavior or speech in Webster's Dictionary. What is it in words and deeds? It is kindness, politeness, understanding and respect. It also includes the concept of taking care of yourself and your responsibility.

The Institute for Civility, a 501(c)3 organization dedicated to promoting civility in "government, workplaces, schools, and anywhere people gather to live, learn, work, and play," states:

Civility is about more than just politeness, although politeness is a necessary first step.

It is about disagreeing without disrespect, seeking common ground as a starting point for dialogue about differences, understanding biases and personal preconceptions, and teaching others to do the same.

Most of us already practice this day-to-day with clients, opposing counsel, co-workers and others we meet in our profession. However, as we leave our offices at the end of a long day, are we still practicing civility as we drive home, go to the grocery store or speak to our families?

Self-care is important and if we do not extend this concept to our daily lives, all day, we are cheating ourselves. Take time to smell the roses, exercise, meditate, listen to music, go to the Derby or eat a grilled cheese sandwich. Enjoy your family, friends and others as you go through life. It really is too short not to.



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Maria
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