

Canadians earn kindly image on daily basis

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Canadians are known in many parts of the world for their polite and gentle ways. As a Canadian myself, I enjoy this complimentary image and when I have travelled to other parts of the world I have benefited from this kindly perception. I hope this persona of gentility is well-deserved and that it may continue long into the future. Nonetheless, this positive image is unlikely to last unless we give thought and effort to cultivating gentleness and courtesy.

Our actions that result in people from many parts of the world admiring the calm and courteous manners of Canadians are often fairly simple and straightforward. Here are a few examples from a senior's perspective. When my wife and I shop, as seniors, it is not unusual for younger citizens to hold doors open for us as we approach a restaurant entrance or are about to enter a store. Inside, the owners and workers who operate businesses often greet us with a friendly smile and welcoming words. Frequently, when we take longer to count out our money or search for the exact change as we purchase goods, store clerks respond with patience and friendliness. Staff take extra time to listen to our seniors stories about our visiting grand children or even to look at a picture of a recent trip or of a newly born grandchild. When we are lined up at the bank we often notice the bank tellers listening with patience as customers ahead of us relate their lengthy stories about what they are planning for the week-end. Surely the elongated stories we like to tell about our health problems or about a recent medical operation must test the patience of even the most gentle and kindly clerks or restaurant servers.

Younger Canadians also benefit from the gentle ways of their own peers. Canadians are happy to assist strangers who need directions within our city. Compared to some countries we have visited, the idea of lining up and waiting one's turn to be served is common practice in Canada, but not so common in

other countries in far-away places. In general terms, Canadians may keep to themselves and quietly mind their own business, but when they see others in need, they tend to rise to the occasion and offer their assistance cheerfully and wholeheartedly. Canadians gladly volunteer their services to search for lost children or pets. They help others during times of weather disasters or other natural crises. Canadians are ready to give a hand to those in need.

Modern society operates at a quicker pace than it used to twenty-five years ago. We have hurried conversations on our cell phones, or more frequently we text succinct messages. By email, we communicate with people who are distant friends, some of whom we may not ever see in person or very rarely visit with them in our homes.

At work, the expectations are that we need to get the job done as quickly as possible. We produce products and services for customers whom we may never meet on a personal basis. There are brief moments for short coffee or washroom breaks. The emphasis at work is to get the tasks completed as soon as possible. This approach is thought to be justified so that various products can be manufactured at competitive prices. There is little time to admire our work or to feel pride in a job well done. Everyday jobs leave few opportunities for personal contact with those we serve.

Of course, some occupations provide opportunities to show courtesy, kindness, and patience. Hopefully, teaching, nursing, health-care, professional counseling, offer times where politeness and interpersonal relations may still be highly valued. Yet, even in these tasks and professions, those who serve are under pressure to work harder, faster, and more efficiently.

Let us hope that, in spite of the pressures that go with our fast paced competitive culture, Canadians will still value the good attributes for which we are famous. We hope that teachers and parents and others can pass along the positive characteristics of friendliness and good will. These are the features that have enabled us to care about others with customary Canadian humility and gentle grace.