

The Power of Respect: Benefit From the Most Forgotten Element of Success

An excerpt

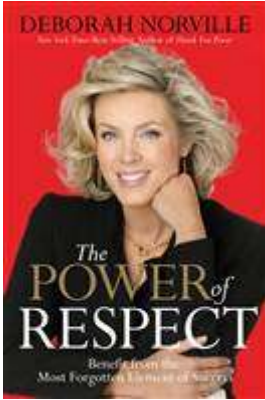
A front-row seat

There's a blessing and a curse to having a job like mine at Inside Edition. The blessing of anchoring this television news show is that I have a front-row seat for what's happening in the world. Sometimes the stories make your heart swell with pride, like the tale of Jason McElwain, who had the respect and admiration of his school — and the entire nation — when he scored an astonishing twenty points in the last four minutes of the final regular game of the season. Most of the time, Jason was known as “the kid with autism,” but on this day, the coach told the seventeen-year-old who served as the team's manager to suit up. Jason had never played in a game before.

Jason was carried off the court on the team's shoulders. Students at the school were clamoring for his autograph. He later got to meet President George W. Bush. His mom, Debbie, said he was an inspiration for people everywhere with disabilities.

If you're ever in a hospital where the walls are alive with color, where ceiling tiles sport rainbows and butterflies just where a patient on a gurney might see them, chances are John Feight has been there. Feight is a man who embodies the Power of Respect. He has spent the past thirty years traveling the world, painting every hospital surface imaginable with beautiful images that promote healing. It started when he was visiting a sick friend and thought the dreary halls could use a splash of color. One little girl, a burn victim, silently watched him work. When he offered her a brush and suggested she help paint, her smile launched a mission that has taken the healing power of art to hospitals in all but a half dozen nations on earth. The founder of the Foundation for Hospital Art, John Feight believes everyone is an artist. Like a pied piper, he attracts visitors, medical staff, and most importantly patients, who eagerly grab brushes to fill in the murals he's sketched.

Feight looks like a doctor in his paint-splattered green scrubs. He says painting takes patients away from their medical problems into a pain-free world of creativity. He learned just how transformative that process could be when he was treated for prostate cancer. As soon as Feight was well enough, he went back to the hospital where he had been treated and painted the bare ceiling he'd stared at during his stay.



The story of Patrick Henry Hughes is another touching reminder that all of us have something unique. Patrick Henry Hughes is just more unique than most. Born blind, with multiple physical disabilities, Patrick Henry has been in a wheelchair his whole life. What he lacks in physical abilities, he more than compensates for in musical talent. His fingers fly over the piano and his voice is clear and strong, creating music that demands that you stop and drink in the sound.

When the University of Louisville marching band hits the field, you can't miss Patrick. That's right — he's the trumpet player in the wheelchair, being maneuvered around by his father. It is a beautiful story of love and respect. His father learns the marching band's routine so he doesn't miss a step during halftime. The elder Mr. Hughes, who's also named Patrick, can also be found in the classrooms at U of L, guiding his son from class to class. He works the overnight shift in order to be available for his son. Mr. Hughes said he never felt he was sacrificing anything for his son. On the contrary, he said, "It's what Patrick does for me." You can't help but watch the Hugheses' incredible story and marvel at the father-son bond as well as feel yourself drawn closer to the loved ones in your own life.

I've loved seeing these stories on Inside Edition, but the flip side of my job is that I see other stories all too close up. Lately the picture isn't very pretty.

There was the cute little cheerleader who thought she was going to a sleepover. Instead she was jumped by her so-called friends, who then proceeded to videotape the attack. The horrible girls proved their stupidity by posting the episode online — enabling the rest of the world to learn of their vicious acts and helping cops to make multiple arrests. Victoria Lindsay was left with a concussion and hearing and vision loss. Her attackers were left with criminal records. They were sentenced to probation.

Did you see the fourteen-year-old kid in Baltimore who got reamed out by the police officer for riding his skateboard where he wasn't supposed to? It was no wonder. It was obvious to everyone (and everyone saw it because the video ended up on YouTube) that young Eric just could not stop himself from saying "dude" to the officer. Officer Rivieri was not amused.

It is ridiculous that anyone would call 911 to complain that the local McDonald's didn't have the Chicken McNuggets she ordered. (Yes, that really happened — in Fort Pierce, Florida.) LaTrea Goodman told cops she wouldn't have made a stink if the cashier taking her order had told her in advance the restaurant was out of McNuggets.

Downright tragic is the only way to describe what happened in DeKalb County, Georgia, where eleven-year-old Jaheem Herrera hanged himself last April. His friend said, "He's tired of everybody always messing with him at school." The boy was the object of "relentless bullying" at his elementary school. His little sister discovered his body.

Outrageous is the adjective that comes to mind in the Thomas Junta story. He's currently serving a six- to ten-year prison sentence for killing a man in Massachusetts during a kids' hockey practice. Junta complained the victim's kids were playing too aggressively. They exchanged words, then Junta beat the man. The children were watching. Junta has twice been denied parole.

We all have our favorite songs, but can you imagine killing a man over a Jimmy Buffett song? Neither can I — but it happened. A soldier from Fort Bragg died after a fight outside a bar in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, last January. Well, it wasn't really even a fight. Richard Lopez had selected a Jimmy Buffett song on the jukebox and some other patrons heckled him about the choice. Later, when Lopez and his friends left the bar, one of the hecklers punched Lopez in the face and his head hit the pavement. He never regained consciousness. Several eyewitnesses say Lopez never raised a hand toward his assailant.

From Hollywood starlets to Wall Street moguls (and many people in between), it is becoming far more common for the headlines to highlight people with disrespectful attitudes and behaviors.

I used to think that people eventually get around to doing the right thing because, well, it's the right thing to do. Yet after years of reporting stories of violence, rudeness, and disrespect, I now realize that may not be the case for everyone.

Frustration about how humans interact is nothing new. Since the time of Confucius, more than two thousand years ago, people have behaved obnoxiously enough to warrant concern.

Excuse me — must we be so rude?

Americans don't often agree on many things, but when it comes to respect, people say there's less of it lately. Nearly eight in ten Americans (79 percent) say a lack of respect and courtesy is a serious national problem, and most people say it's getting worse (60 percent). Seventy-three percent say we used to treat one another with greater respect. When asked if they felt that way because of "a false nostalgia for a past that never existed," only 21 percent said yes. The rest of us think that Americans' attitude of disrespect really is worse these days.

Rudeness in America

- 79 percent say lack of respect is a serious problem.
- 60 percent say rude and selfish behavior is increasing.
- 88 percent sometimes encounter rude people.
- 62 percent are bothered by rude behavior.

- 77 percent see clerks ignoring customers.
- 58 percent encounter aggressive drivers.
- 56 percent are bothered by foul language.

What has people feeling this way? The list is long and touches on almost every aspect of daily life. Get cut off by someone on the highway? In a 2002 survey conducted by Public Agenda, aggressive driving topped the list of “aggravating circumstances.” Fifty-eight percent of survey respondents say they are confronted by reckless and aggressive drivers, and nearly two-thirds believe it’s getting worse. One lady who ’fessed up to being aggressive behind the wheel (and 35 percent admit they’re guilty of aggressive driving) said the car was like a cocoon, separating you from the other drivers and providing a sense of anonymity. It’s easy to act like a jerk when you feel no connection to the folks around you.

Sideline screamers also made the list. Out-of-control parents at youth sports events who shout at coaches, referees, and the kids are not just getting on the nerves of the person being yelled at. In the Public Agenda survey, 71 percent of people who watch organized sports for kids say they’ve seen sideline screamers, and two thirds are bothered by them.

Loud cell phone use, calls in inappropriate places, crude language on the Internet or in conversation, surly staff at stores, and those interminable waits on customer “service” lines at companies also ranked high on the list of aggravations.

What is respect?

What exactly is respect? Thanks to Aretha Franklin, we all know how to spell it. Her strong, powerful rendition of the song “Respect” makes listeners sit a bit straighter, walk a bit taller, and be a bit more self-assured. But Aretha singing about respect did something more: it inspired us to expect respect from others.

The song was written by Otis Redding, but under Aretha its message took on a life of its own. Jerry Wexler, who influenced the careers of stars like Ray Charles, Bob Dylan, and the Drifters, produced many of Franklin’s hits, including “Respect.” He told Rolling Stone magazine the song was “global in its influence, with overtones of the civil-rights movement and gender equality. It was an appeal for dignity.”

With Aretha Franklin at the microphone, the song “Respect” became an anthem for anyone who’d felt diminished and disrespected — and there were plenty of them in 1967 when the song topped the charts. Listen carefully to the song, and you’ll hear that it is really a command. You better find out what I consider respect to be.

Discover what someone else calls respect. That is the key to the Power of Respect. While there are some generally agreed-upon ideas of what respect is, at its heart, the definition of respect is different for everyone. In this book, you will discover ways to find out what respect means to you and experience the Power of Respect in your own life.

The dictionary defines respect as “To feel or show deferential regard for; esteem.” My own definition after having spent so much time exploring respect is “Acknowledging the value and uniqueness of others and being mindful of their feelings, while at the same time trying to put myself in their position.”

The word itself comes from the Latin *respectus*, which means “regard.” Break it down further — *re-*, meaning “back,” and *specere*, meaning “look at” — and we can understand why respect is such a potent force. It all comes down to how you “look back at” yourself and others.

Self-respect is a critical component of success. Your sense of self-respect is dictated by how you “look back at” yourself and is largely determined by your sense of self-worth. Am I reaching my potential? Am I living my life as I should? Am I pleased with the choices I have made and the direction my life is taking? Am I caring for my health? Am I nourishing my intellect? Am I where I want to be on my spiritual journey? These are some of the default checks made when measuring your self-respect. Notice they all are areas of your life over which you have control.

Respect is also about how others “look back at” us. We cannot control how others regard us. We can only determine our standing among others by the cues we perceive. Am I greeted with enthusiasm (or not at all)? Am I picked for the team? Is my opinion solicited (and if so, acted upon)? Am I invited to the party? Am I being made to wait longer than that other customer? Is my boss abrupt with me? We constantly ask these questions and process our perceptions of daily interactions. These help us intuit where we rank in the social hierarchy. The more intimate the relationship and the person’s impact on our life, the more importance we attach to how we perceive his or her response.

Respect requires empathy, the capacity to anticipate and understand the feelings of others. It requires consideration. It is letting the Golden Rule shape the way we interact. It’s being mindful to see a situation from another’s perspective. When respect is given, it communicates to the recipient of the respect that he is valued and important. That unleashes the Power of Respect: the goodwill generated boomerangs back to the giver in the form of loyalty, trust, and mutual respect.

Across America, there is a general sense that people are not as nice as they used to be. Remember, 79 percent of us think a lack of respect and courtesy is a big problem. What’s happening in the outside world seems to be spilling over into schools, where 73 percent of teachers and 68 percent of parents believe kids absorb the disrespect that is rampant in our culture and bring it with them to class. It’s costing businesses in lost productivity as

employees who feel unimportant decrease their work effort or, worse, leave to find jobs where they do feel valued. It's impacting our relationships, where those forgotten niceties create divides that widen into irreparable breaches.

At this writing, America is in the worst economic crisis in more than a generation. A return to civility will not immediately thaw the freeze in credit or restore decimated 401(k)s. A new climate of respect will not create new jobs, nor will it turn Ponzi schemers of the Bernie Madoff ilk into law-abiding citizens.

The Power of Respect, however, can make a difference.

The Power of Respect can keep families intact. Kids who learn to respect their parents, and are in turn shown respect by their parents, are more likely to succeed in life than kids who did not have respect taught and modeled in the home.

The Power of Respect can keep marriages together. In the majority of lasting marriages, both spouses say the respect they have for each other has been an essential component in their partnership. The Power of Respect can save lives. In a new epidemic in America, called "bullycide," an increasing number of kids kill themselves every year, no longer able to endure the taunts and harassment of bullies. The Power of Respect can restore relationships, create an atmosphere where friendships thrive, and inspire people to give more of themselves to others.

The Power of Respect can restore calm to our classrooms. It can enable students to learn more and score higher on achievement tests, where lately America is falling woefully behind.

The Power of Respect can save American businesses an estimated sixty-four billion dollars. That's the estimated cost of losing and replacing professionals and managers who quit their jobs because of perceived workplace unfairness. That staggering figure is equivalent to the gross domestic product of the fifty-five wealthiest countries in the world!

The Power of Respect can increase effectiveness of leaders in every area of life by elevating respect for authority and increasing the likelihood that people will respond to their leadership in a positive way.

The Power of Respect can foster individual achievement through self-respect. Feeling valued by others bolsters confidence and inspires creativity. Individuals, once tentative and hesitant, will find the courage to push the boundaries and accomplish new goals.

Proof of the Power of Respect

How can I state with such certainty that the Power of Respect can make a difference? Because there is proof. For the past two years, I have been trolling academic literature

looking for evidence that measurable benefits could be attributed to more respectful, civil interactions between individuals. In my previous book, Thank You Power, I pointed out the connection between the practice of gratitude and positive measurable outcomes, including better health, improved cognitive skills, greater resilience, and a more positive outlook. As an “others-focused” emotion, Thank You Power shifts the emphasis from yourself to another individual, with impressive benefits coming back to yourself.

This boomerang effect of putting the concerns of others ahead of your own has been shown to yield unexpected but welcome payback to the giver.

The Power of Respect works in a similar way. As you will see in the chapters that follow, the others-focused aspect of the Power of Respect elevates the recipients of respect, causing them to operate at higher performance. Whether you are a parent wanting to teach your children to be responsible family members, a business leader trying to increase worker productivity, or a schoolteacher eager for your students to learn, the benefits of respect actually return to you in the form of improved relationships and increased effectiveness in your pursuits.

Successful people know that no one climbs the tallest mountains alone. The view from the top is always sweeter when shared with someone else. The Power of Respect not only will assure that you reach your goals, but it also will assure that many friends and loved ones will be there cheering when you do.

Respect reminders

Being respectful to others makes them feel valued. Respectful people are trusted.

Respect fosters “connectedness” which leads to:

- Stronger personal relationships.
- Greater employee loyalty.
- Higher customer sales.
- Improvements in education.
- Greater creativity.

###