

# THE RIGHT MENTAL ATTITUDE

An old Ann Landers column contains some excellent advice from one of her readers. This lady said that at one time she assumed that a wealthy woman whom she only knew slightly was an arrogant snob because she rarely spoke and never smiled. She also had the feeling that the woman in the supermarket with the whining children was a lousy mother. “Then,” she said, “one day I stood in line at the grocery store. I noticed that the clerk never smiled at the customers and ignored light conversation.” She said, “I was tempted to tell her what I thought of her sour attitude when the elderly woman in front of me took a different approach. She said, ‘Honey, you look like you’re having a bad day.’ The clerk looked up with the saddest eyes I’ve ever seen and said, ‘My husband lost his job yesterday and I just found out I am pregnant.’ The lady patted her hand and said, ‘Dear, things will work out.’ When it was my turn,” she said, “the clerk had tears in her eyes, but she smiled, and I felt ashamed of myself for being so intolerant.” Then the lesson she teaches is significant. She said, “That instant made me realize that people usually aren’t rude because they’re mean and want to make my life miserable. They are unpleasant because they have problems on their mind and a heavy heart. My entire outlook changed that day and I am now much more compassionate.” She said, “I now assume the frowning woman might be worried about the results of a biopsy. The rude young driver could be on his way to the emergency room to meet an injured relative, and the distracted mother with the screaming child in the supermarket may need my smile and a kind word. Perhaps the only one she will get all day.” This reader said, “This change in my attitude has made those around me happier, but the greatest benefit is mine. I am less angry and more serene, and I like myself better than I used to.”

I can certainly relate to what this dear lady was saying. A few years ago when I was doing an early-

morning seminar, I greeted the young woman who was guarding the backstage door with a cheerful “Good morning, how are you doing?” She said, “I’m not doing well. I hate to be here.” I confidently, cheerfully and arrogantly said to her, “Well, think about it this way. There are some people who don’t have any kind of job doing anything, so maybe you’ll feel better with that thought.” The young woman looked at me and said, “Look, I’m not ready for any of your ‘positive thinking.’ I’m having an extremely tough time.” As I walked away I thought to myself, “Boy! What a lousy attitude!” However, as I pondered it during the next few minutes I realized that what she needed was some empathy, somebody to say, “Is there anything I can do?” or, “I’m sorry things are not going your way.” I went back at my earliest possible moment to apologize to the young woman. Unfortunately, she was gone. That’s one of the reasons today I talk a great deal more about the right attitude in addition to having a positive attitude. In that particular incident, my relationship with that young woman, and the possibility of giving her any real encouragement later, was destroyed because I was so intent on saying what I had to say and not really empathetic to her problem. Relationships are built on putting yourself in the other person’s position and trying to, as the old Indian adage says, “You won’t know another person until you’ve walked in his moccasins at least one day.” Try to imagine how he or she must feel and you can deal with them more effectively and get along with them far better – and feel better about yourself in the process.

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