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DIGNITY...WE ALL CRAVE IT, SO WHY DO WE KEEP IGNORING IT?

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What is the motivating force behind all human interaction – in families, in communities, in the business world, and in relationships from the personal level to the international level? DIGNITY. It is the desire to be treated well. It is an unspoken human yearning that is at the heart of all conflicts, yet no one is paying attention to it.

When dignity is violated, the response is likely to involve aggression, even violence, hatred, and vengeance; the human connection is the first thing to go. On the other hand, when people treat each others with dignity, they feel their worth is recognized, creating lasting and meaningful relationships. Surprisingly, most people have little understanding of dignity. While a desire for dignity is universal, knowing how to honor it in ourselves and others is not.

After working as a conflict resolution specialist for twenty years, I have observed and researched the circumstances that give rise to dignity violations. On the other hand, when the following ten elements of dignity are honored, people feel their dignity has been recognized and that they have been treated well. Relationships flourish under these conditions.

The Ten Essential Elements of Dignity

Acceptance of Identity. Approach people as being neither inferior nor superior to you. Give others the freedom to express their authentic selves without fear of being negatively judged. Interact without prejudice or bias, accepting the ways in which race, religion, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, age, and disability may be at the core of the other people's identities. Assume that others have integrity.

Inclusion. Make others feel that they belong, whatever the relationship—whether they are in your family, community, organization, or nation.

Safety. Put people at ease at two levels: physically, so they feel safe from bodily harm, and psychologically, so they feel safe from being humiliated. Help them feel free to speak without fear of retribution.

Acknowledgement. Give people your full attention by listening, hearing, validating, and responding to their concerns, feelings, and experiences.

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Recognition. Validate others for their talents, hard work, thoughtfulness, and help. Be generous with praise, and show appreciation and gratitude to others for their contributions and ideas.

Fairness. Treat people justly, with equality, and in an evenhanded way according to agreed-on laws and rules. People feel that you have honored their dignity when you treat them without discrimination or injustice.

Benefit of the Doubt. Treat people as trustworthy. Start with the premise that others have good motives and are acting with integrity.

Understanding. Believe that what others think matters. Give them the chance to explain and express their points of view. Actively listen in order to understand them.

Independence. Encourage people to act on their own behalf so that they feel in control of their lives and experience a sense of hope and possibility.

Accountability. Take responsibility for your actions. If you have violated the dignity of another person, apologize. Make a commitment to change your hurtful behaviors.

Our desire for dignity resides deep within us, defining our common humanity. If our capacity for indignity is our lowest common denominator, then our yearning for dignity is our highest. And if indignity tears relationships apart, then dignity can put them back together again.

Our ignorance of all things related to dignity — how to claim our own and how to honor it in others — has contributed to many of the conflicts we see in the world today. This is as true in the boardroom and in the bedroom, as it is in politics and international relations. It is true for all human interaction. If we are to evolve as a species, there is no greater need than to learn how to treat each other and ourselves with dignity. It is the glue that could hold us all together. And it doesn't stop there. Not only does dignity make for good human relationships, it does something perhaps far more important—it creates the conditions for our mutual growth and development. It is a distraction to have to defend oneself from indignity. It takes up our time and uses up our precious energy. The power of dignity, on the other hand, only expands with use. The more we give, the more we get.

There is no greater leadership challenge than to lead with dignity, helping us all to understand what it feels like to be honored and valued and to feel the incalculable benefits that come from experiencing it.

The leadership challenge is at all levels—for those in the world of politics, business, education, religion, to everyday leadership in our personal lives.

Peace will not flourish anywhere without dignity.

There is no such thing as democracy without dignity, or can there be authentic peace if people are suffering indignities.

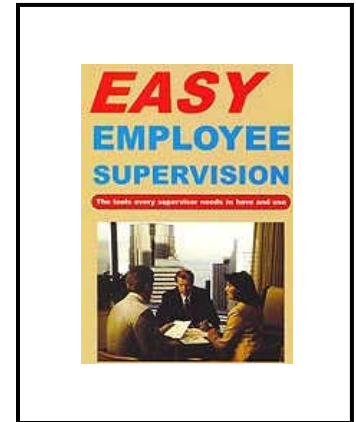
Last but not least, feeling dignity's power—both by honoring it and locating our own inner source of it—sets us up for one of humanity's greatest gifts—the experience of being in relationship with others in a way that brings out the best in one another, allowing us to become more of what we are capable of being.

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POTPOURRI

- **VOW To Hire Heroes Act of 2011**

On November 21, 2011 President Obama signed the *Veterans Opportunity to Work to Hire Heroes Act of 2011*. The legislation provides tax credits to help put veterans back to work. Included in the new law is the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program for unemployed veterans. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Labor (DOL) are working together to roll out this new program on July 1, 2012. The new program will provide retraining for Veterans hardest hit by current economic conditions. The program is limited to 45,000 participants during fiscal year 2012 and to 54,000 participants from October 1, 2012 through March 31, 2014. Participants may receive up to 12 months of assistance at the full-time payment rate under the Montgomery GI Bill-Active Duty program (currently \$1,473 per month). Applications will be submitted through DOL and benefits paid by VA. DOL will provide employment assistance to every Veteran who participates upon completion of their program.

- <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2011/11/21/president-obama-hire-veteran>
- http://www.gibill.va.gov/benefits/other_programs/vow.html

- **EEOC Complaint Activity Increases**

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) saw a 7% increase in case load during its last Fiscal Year. 64% of their cases were deemed to have “no reasonable cause,” and nearly 5% were judged to have reasonable cause after investigation. A total of \$319.4 million were collected on behalf of employees during the year.

- <http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/statistics/enforcement/all.cfm>

- **OFCCP Files Proposed Regs Requiring 7% Disability Hiring**

On December 9, 2011 the OFCCP filed its 50-page notice to amend its regulations on Section 503 of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973* to require federal contractors to strive for 7% disabled employees in their workforce. Comments are due February 7, 2012.

<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2011-12-09/pdf/2011-31371.pdf>

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OPM PUBLISHES GUIDANCE FOR DIVERSITY PLANS

In November 2001, the Federal Office of Personnel Management (OPM) published a 34-page document entitled, "Guidance for Agency-Specific Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plans." It has suggestions for federal agencies on Workforce Diversity, Workforce Inclusion and suggests Sample Practices.

The report offers suggestions for measuring diversity and inclusion within departments and presents comparisons between EEO obligations and the Diversity and Inclusion functions.

You can obtain a copy of the report on-line at:

<http://www.opm.gov/diversityandinclusion/reports/DIAgencySpecificStrategicPlanGuidance.pdf>

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