

Whatever Happened to “Mr.?”

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With the holiday season coming to a close, it seemed that people tried to be a little more polite, more doors were opened, more “pleases” and “thank yous” heard. The spirit of the season appeared to have had an affect on people. During this time of year, people are at their nicest. However, during the rest of the year courtesy appears to be a bit more random. While driving I have been let in and cut off, waved at and given, well, let’s just say unfriendly hand gestures all in the period of less than a minute. Doesn’t it seem that as the years go by we are becoming a less polite society? Remember old sayings like “respect your elders?” Remember when they weren’t just old sayings?

I am a father, grandfather, business owner and senior educator, and yet, as I go about my daily activities such as shopping, business appointments and the like, I am constantly greeted by such titles as “dude,” “man,” “honey” and referred to casually by people with whom my only relationship is business. I have been called by my first name at doctor’s appointments, at my son’s high school and I have even been introduced as “Phil” to the small children of people I have just met. Whatever happened to “Mr.?” (Cultural note: apparently “Honey” is a perfectly acceptable title for all male adults when visiting a Waffle House).

As I approach 50, slowly I hope, I look back to my childhood and think of my parents’ friends, associates and neighbors. If I were to see my former neighbor Mrs. Brown today, I would definitely still call her Mrs. Brown. Even my Aunt Betty was, and always will be, Aunty Betty. It seems we began losing our traditions of respect about the same time common sense and common courtesy became, well....less common.

I did have an old school victory a while back when my oldest daughter’s boyfriend asked the question “may I ask your first name?” Of course I said, “It’s Mr.”

Now the old ways are not always that easy in modern society. What do you call your stepfather? I am sure there are women out there who might take exception to the dreaded word ma’am, and I realize there are middle aged men that actually prefer to be called dude, man or honey.

With all this in mind, the purpose of this article is not to solve the issue, but just to get people to think. Perhaps I have been a teacher too long or maybe I ‘m just being nostalgic, but I just hope that I become “sir” at least for a little while before I become “hey, old man!”