

Rude Behavior in Public
By: Jill Evans Kryston
Etiquette Consultant

“Excuse me, but I’m next!” was the thought that went through my mind as a man suddenly slipped in line ahead of me at a customer service counter. The woman behind me and I were obviously annoyed, but what was the appropriate action to take?

Many people ignore rude behavior because they’re either caught off guard and don’t have enough time to react, or they want to avoid confrontation. Cutting in line or taking a parking space someone’s been waiting for is never acceptable.

When is it okay to stand up to rude behavior? A person can confront rude behavior as long as they don’t return one unkind act for another. This is not the time to do to others as they have just done to you. Secondly, you may call attention to the offense if you sense it won’t turn into a nasty confrontation.

Staying cool and remaining pleasant will usually get the point across. When you return an insult you’re not only fueling the situation, you’re also stooping to that person’s level. On the other hand, you can “kill ‘em with kindness” with a polite and respectful comment such as, “Excuse me, I’m afraid I was ahead of you.” Hopefully your thoughtful response will shame the offender into acting more civilized in the future.

The next time you’re confronted with rude behavior consider these suggestions: 1.) Do not take the offense personally. 2.) Take the focus off your hurt feelings and give the person the benefit of the doubt. He or she may be having a bad day - they could have lost their job or worse, a loved one. 3.) Evaluate your irritation. What will it accomplish if you complain about the person who has ten items over the limit in the express lane? Determine what will be the cost to your physical and emotional energy if you create a scene. 4.) Always be prepared to set a polite example. Good manners can be contagious. 5.) Take a deep breath, slowly count to five and ask yourself, “Is it worth blowing my top over the person holding up the line with his or her cell phone conversation?” 6.) Learn to laugh and not take yourself too seriously. After a rude comment, encourage a positive response with some self-deprecating sarcasm or chuckle and change the subject.

As life’s pace increases, rude behavior seems to be on the rise. You can be a part of the solution when you practice common courtesies, remembering that one good turn deserves another, and understand that rudeness begets rudeness. So the next time there are noisy people behind you in the movie theater, instead of shouting at them to shut-up, simply turn around and say, “Excuse me, but you’re making it hard for us to hear.” If such rudeness persists, seek assistance from the management or write a letter of complaint.

Whenever rude behavior takes place, age-old wisdom calls for choosing your battles. Fight only those battles that need to be fought and steer clear of all the others.