

The Housekeeper

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The law of life that all other laws stem from is “treat others as you would like to be treated.” Since I was very young, this has been my parent’s favorite principle and has been taught to me as the “golden rule.” It is something I have been expected to uphold as a part of the Hoyles family and something I will someday expect my children and family members to live by. However, I did not always think this was the main law to life.

When I was in eighth grade, the housekeeper came into the house one day to clean while I was watching the dogs. I talked to her for a moment then turned back to the computer screen and talked to my friends. I realized that the same lady who had been coming into our home for about six years was there to clean and believed there was no reason for me to pick up my clothes before she got there like my mother had told me to do. Two days had passed and when she came in again my room had not been picked up. It was a disaster to say the least. She asked me to help pick up my clothes and sort them so she could know which ones needed washed and which simply needed hung up. I told her I was busy and left the house to run. When I returned home, my mother told me we would be having a family meeting before dinner and to not be late.

At the family meeting, my mother said I would be a freshman in high school next year which meant I would gain privileges but also responsibilities. “Therefore,” she said, “Ms. Linda will not be cleaning your room or bathroom anymore. Nor will she be doing any of your laundry.” I was shocked and immediately started to throw a temper tantrum. How could my mother do this to me? As if things were not bad enough, my mother believed my brother and I had become brats and the family needed intervention quickly. The answer to our problem, a family paper route with the Columbus Dispatch.

I didn’t think it would be bad but after waking at 1:30 am to go to the depot and pick up papers with my family, then walked over 600 papers to porches and not returning to bed until 6am all to wake up at 7am and go to school, for about a week, I was exhausted. I soon learned that complaining only got me nowhere but into new neighborhoods throwing more papers. The routes grew until we carried about 900 papers everyday with over 75% of them being porches.

As a paper carrier, I was treated like trash. People would often hide behind their doors if they were up waiting for their papers to avoid confrontation. Not only was it humiliating, but also it was humbling. One customer called my house one day and my father let me try to handle the phone call. It was a man who yelled about how he wanted his paper on his porch not at his garage door. What he failed to mention was his porch sat back about a quarter of a mile from the road and his driveway went downhill at a dangerous slope. When it got icy outside, my father refused to drive in the driveway fearing the car would slide past the house into the river. When I called my manager to explain the problem, he told me I would simply have to slide on my rear-end down the icy driveway and then climb on my hands and knees back up. It was an impossible feat and I ended it in tears and out of breath. It was unreal that the customer was always right

even at the expense of my safety. I could not believe I was being treated like I was.

Finally, within the past two years, something clicked. The way I was being treated was the way I had begun to treat Ms. Linda. When I talked to my mom about it, I began to cry. She told me I owed only two people apologies, Ms. Linda and myself. I had broken the golden rule and I was not happy with my life or the way it was turning out. I had to change.

When Ms. Linda returned later that day, I set a vase of flowers on the kitchen counter for her and had already cleaned everything. I asked her if instead of cleaning, she would sit and talk to me. She said yes and listened while I explained my stories. When I was done, she began to cry and waited for me to say something. Finally it made sense. "I'm sorry." I said sobbing. She gave me a hug and a quick kiss on the head. She forgave me.

Ms. Linda was a lot like my mother. She took care of my a lot of times while my parents were out and always made sure the shopping was done, house was clean and school supplies were bought. That day, I will never forget her telling me her story. She was married once to a man who abused her. She left him and unfortunately in court, he gained full custody of the children because the judge believed she could not afford them and her ex-husband had hired a very prominent attorney. She missed her children desperately but never got to see them so she had looked at my brother and I as her children away from home. She worked as a manager at Bob Evans and would clean houses when she got off work. She would work every opportunity she could to show the judge she could support the children. I could not believe her story. She was such a respectful, strong, role model woman and I judged her and treated her poorly because she was a house cleaner not realizing why she did what she did.

I spoke with Ms. Linda just a few weeks ago. She no longer cleans houses and her children now get to stay with her on the weekends. Her family comes over for dinner about once a month and we all enjoy time together. She has become a manager at a telecommunications company and has better hours and wages. She is the happiest person I know and treats everyone with utmost respect. I thank her for treating me with respect when I did not return the gesture and I thank my parents for teaching me a valuable lesson.

As for me, I still carry papers because I believe that one day, people will see the good in what I do and see that I care about making them happy. The money goes to my parents to help pay for my education. Customers have now begun to talk to me and many baked me things on Christmas, my favorite being a very elderly lady who made me a hot chocolate and an egg sandwich to take with me. I have learned that because I try my hardest and treat them with respect, though some hide from me, they eventually come around and return the gesture.

It is very rewarding to treat others the way you like to be treated. It pays to put in the extra effort to be nice when you see the smile you put on some one's face. That is why the golden rule of life is to treat others the way you would like to be treated.