

## On Being Human

Some of you may know that one of my favorite pastimes is reading the biographies and memoirs of US presidents and other notables. I recently came across an observation on civility that deserves to be shared and discussed. Will Rogers, a much beloved humorist and entertainer from the 1930's, was by far the nation's most widely read newspaper columnist, most popular radio show host and highest grossing movie box-office star. When Rogers was killed in a plane crash in 1935, the outpouring of national grief equalled the level of mourning at president Lincoln's funeral 70 years earlier.

That Rogers was truly great in his chosen fields is undisputed. That he was also much *beloved* is a testament to his philosophy that, "It's great to be great, but it's better to be human." Lady Montagu espoused this same value when she said, "Civility costs nothing and buys everything." And Samuel Johnson echoed this wisdom when he said, "The true measure of a man is how he treats someone who can do him no good."

There is obviously a common thread in these sentiments: that being human—happy, kind, courteous and humble—can elevate one's reputation—earned through business, professional, social or athletic achievement—into the lofty realm of "beloved." Unfortunately, it follows that the opposite is true. Think of the sports figures and movie stars who do outstanding work yet are personally disliked because they lack civility. To bring this topic around to the business world, consider the many companies that produce perfectly fine products yet are disliked in the marketplace due to their lack of sincere courtesy and consideration for their customers and employees.

How we treat one another—our colleagues, our customers, our suppliers, our partners and others—impacts how well we do as an organization. Being "human" earns us lifelong dividends of trust and respect impossible to attain simply by reducing late shipments or improving quality. When we treat our customers and co-workers with civility—no matter how difficult that task may seem at the time—we earn a bit of that "beloved" status that Rogers enjoyed in abundance.

I'll leave you with one final quote from the late great Bostonian and jurist Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., delivering an unguarded assessment of Franklin Delano Roosevelt: "He has a second rate intellect, but a first rate temperament". A bit harsh. But wouldn't you agree that, if true, Roosevelt had the better end of the deal?

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