

Seven

EARNING RESPECT OUTSIDE THE WORKPLACE

Put First Things First.

—Stephen R. Covey,
The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People

We identified several venues where we spend a lot of our time, depending on what stage in life we find ourselves. We have covered the workplace where we interact with our employer and coworkers. We will now cover the other venues and explore how respect may be gained and sustained. But first, the popular venues are recalled as follows:

home (family)	worship house (congregation)
hangout (friends / peers)	social event (social group)
school (classmates)	public domain (general public)
workplace (employer / coworkers)	foreign country (hosts)

HOME

Let us begin with the home. The popular adage “There is no place like home” sets the stage for this discussion. The context of a home, as I define it, consists of a married couple with children—a family—or a married couple with plans to establish a family. For single-parent households, much of the principles I present would still apply. The organizational structure within a household, whether single-parent or dual-parent, fits into the hierarchical category of drivers that we covered in the chapter on positional respect.

Much of the principles presented here would also apply to personal (boyfriend-girlfriend) relationships, especially where a long-term commitment is intended or in place. The context in such a case would be the relationship, as opposed to the hierarchical structure and dynamics of a family.

There are many factors that influence the dynamic relationships within a family structure—culture, tradition, belief system, spirituality, and so on. Professionals and other experts—psychologists, psychiatrists, and sociologists—have a firm understanding of most of these dynamic factors. It is advisable that individuals within a dysfunctional family or with serious family problems consult professionals who are better trained at dealing with such issues.

My question here, nevertheless, is simple: how can you gain respect at home, within a family system? This question does not assume a lack of respect at the present time; instead, it assumes an opportunity to gain, or increase, the current level of respect in a sustained manner. There is little value in exploring strategies for a short-term gain in respect. There is, however, much more value in exploring strategies for sustained increase in the level of respect within your family, for a better quality of life. Using a continuous improvement approach found in the business world, which is how

I have chosen to address this topic of respect, and based on the three fundamental components of respect presented so far, the primary focal point, I believe, is the family value system. This refers to the psychological process that is used to assign value (worth) by members, to other members and to other attributes of the family. But first, there has to be a level playing field. Let me explain.

Putting on my business professional hat, in a visible way, there is a concept that I am employing here to make a case. This concept is rooted in the theory of probability, and I shall state it as simply as possible. In the world of business, a process (that is, a set of activities) exhibits a normal characteristic if the only cause of errors (problems) is due to chance; however, if there are other special causes of errors (problems), then the process exhibits a nonnormal (abnormal) characteristic.

Here is an example that I believe better illustrates this concept and one that we can all understand—let's suppose that you have a mom-and-pop business that involves baking cupcakes, and you have perfected a winning recipe that customers have come to love. Your process of baking the cupcakes that always meet the standards that your customers love will be considered “normal” as long as you use the same quality ingredients and follow the exact same recipe steps every time. Although the cupcakes may vary slightly in taste and texture from day to day, this variation is purely due to chance—a natural phenomenon.

However, if one day you decide to use a new additional ingredient that leads to a different batch of cupcakes that your customers quickly disapprove of, then you have introduced a special cause of error (or problem) and this leads your baking process to exhibit a “nonnormal,” or abnormal, characteristic that negatively impacts your customers. Special causes are not considered natural causes because they are primarily introduced by special circumstances. In fact, special causes are mostly identifiable and addressable. Once the special cause—the new additional cup cake ingredient—is identified and removed, your baking process

reverts back to its normal predictable way that customers once again can enjoy.

So what do I mean when I state that there has to be a level playing field prior to focusing on the family value system as a source of gaining respect? What I mean is that there has to be an identification and removal of any special causes of problems within a family unit, before resorting to the family value system. Special causes are abnormalities that exist within a family system or within a relationship, and include excessive drinking or abuse of alcohol, substance abuse and use of illicit drugs, mental disorder, and other similar extreme and destabilizing factors.

These special causes, just as I illustrated in the cupcake analogy, lead to an abnormal family environment. Think about it. If you have one member of a family, perhaps a parent, regularly abusing alcohol, then how can you expect a normal family environment? Similarly, if you have one member of a family periodically engaging in drug abuse, then how can you expect normality within the family unit? The existence of special causes leads to impairment of self-respect and greatly diminishes the ability of the impaired individual to behave in a manner worthy of respect. Therefore, there has to be an absence of special causes within a family environment, prior to any focus on the family value system. Special causes usually require professional assistance and care, especially when children are in the picture and a history of family turmoil exists.

So how can your family value system be a source for gaining respect within the home? Here is a simple analogy—let's reflect for a moment on the internal dynamics of an American football team. Such a team consists of various units that include an offensive unit, a defensive unit, and a special (team) unit. For the football team to function properly and succeed, it operates using a common playbook—a set of codes, rules, and strategies that are clearly and thoughtfully established, vetted, mastered, rehearsed, and methodically executed time and time again. The playbook directs the activities of each of the units on the team