

Youth Culture Lesson
Finding Teachable Moments in Culture
From *YouthWorker Journal* and YouthWorker.com

Magic Words

Are 'Please' and 'Thank you' vanishing from culture?

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Posted: March 20, 2012

What Happened:

"May I have a coffee, please? Thank you."

According to some etiquette experts, that verbal exchange is fast becoming something from an earlier age. It's not the coffee that's going away: People will be getting that for centuries to come. It's the *Please* and *Thank you* that are becoming extinct.

Though most of our parents have drummed into us the importance of saying the so-called magic words—*Please* when we want something; *Thank you* when we get it—many cultural observers say fewer people use them in everyday transactions. Phrases such as *You're welcome* also are becoming obsolete.

Some of that is because we've transitioned into a more casual age: *Thank you* becomes "Got it." *You're welcome* becomes "No prob" or "You bet." "The slow erosion of the magic words in our everyday vernacular has to do with the predilection toward all things casual in our society today," Lisa Gache, who teaches manners in Beverly Hills, told National Public Radio. "Casual conversation, casual dress and casual behavior have hijacked practically all areas of life; and I do not think it is doing anyone a service."

It's not just that. Many experts say our culture also is becoming increasingly focused on speed—and linguistic niceties slow things down and invite longer conversations. The fact that many of us spend so much time talking with one another via Facebook and text also cuts down the felt need to adhere to what seems to be ancient decorum.

Some people think we're just not as polite as we used to be. Last year, Rasmussen Reports found that 76 percent of us believe we're becoming ruder.

"Simple things that we took for granted as children no longer seem to count," says Gregory Smith, a psychiatrist in Augusta, Georgia. "Saying please and thank you, asking permission, offering unsolicited help...are no longer as important."

Others insist we're not losing our ability to be polite. We're just recalibrating what *polite* means—and changing the words we use. Is there really a big difference between saying "You're welcome," and saying, "No problem?" Experts say not necessarily. "What won't change," says Cindy Post Senning, an etiquette expert, "is the importance of acknowledging appreciation expressed."

Talk About It:

How important do you think traditional magic words such as *please* and *thank you* are these days? Do you use these words more frequently around folks who are your parents' and grandparents' age than with your friends? How important are these words when you're at home? How important are they at school or elsewhere?

Do you say *please* and *thank you* to everyone you deal with? Your teachers? Your youth leaders? Waiters or coffee baristas? Police officers when they give you a traffic ticket?

Do you think overall we're becoming ruder? If so, why?

What the Bible Says:

“Show proper respect for everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king” (1 Pet. 2:17).

“Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone” (Col. 4:6).

“Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men” (Titus 3:1-2).