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The Power of Office Courtesy

The Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army, Installations, Housing & Partnerships (DASA (IH&P)) asked me to submit an article for this issue of *The Communicator* on office courtesy. I told myself (and my ego) that Mr. Cramer, DASA, IH&P, must have really, really enjoyed my last, hard-hitting article entitled "Elvis has not left the Building" – which discussed office souvenirs (it is, by the way, proudly displayed on my refrigerator alongside my seven-year-old's latest art work – I wish I were kidding). I think that Mr. Cramer enjoyed that article so much that he wanted an even bigger article – with even more words, graphics, stories, etc. (I may be reaching here a bit, but I have to get myself "psyched up" for the writing process).

I thought the topic of office courtesy (generally defined as behaving, conducting oneself respectfully in the work place) would be a piece of cake. Basically, practice the "golden rule," help co-workers out when they go on leave (i.e. water their plants if necessary to avoid botanical disasters), say "please" and "thank you" when interacting with all colleagues, respect people's space, etc. I thought, "I should be done with this in 15 minutes!" Be polite in your office area, and be a good team player. Yes, this is all true and works well for most organizations.

However, ASA (IE&E) is a special organization. We are simply not one singular office in one singular location. We have many global responsibilities and interests, and we sometimes have to make tough decisions in the name of limited resources. This is indeed a very challenging situation. How do you maintain a positive spirit of office courtesy when your office is literally the world, with locations ranging from the Pentagon and surrounding Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Area, to the entire

country, to almost everywhere?

Do we lose that powerful close-knit concept of a team? If we do, how do we get it back? Sometimes our decisions are not always popular and office courtesy might not seem that important. It can become a challenge to execute our daily responsibilities, let alone move from an environment of courtesy to a powerful and positive office culture (the ideal



next step). All of this complicates the rightful importance of office courtesy.

In a desperate search for answers to the issues posed above and with a deadline fast approaching, I found the answers to my questions from two excellent business articles entitled "Business Etiquette, 5 Rules that Matter Now" by Elizabeth Browning and "7 Things Really Respected People Do" by Kevin Daum. Both lay out key tenets for growing basic office courtesies into powerful office cultures. The best part – ASA (IE&E) already practices these tenets.

Let's take a look at one major tenet from each article. First, Browning states one way to strengthen office courtesies is to understand the importance of "knowing the names, or reaching out to people in your company, regardless of their roles, and acknowledge what they do." Our leadership, up and down the chain of command, is expert at this,

formally and informally recognizing the great work done by the people at ASA (IE&E). This positive recognition is a combat multiplier with lasting impact.

Next, whenever and wherever possible, deliver that "thank you" in person. I witnessed a valuable lesson in this when our very own Col. Backus asked me to walk with him to meet and thank the Career Senior Leader Management Office (CSLMO) team for their support on a recent function. The whole time I was wondering why we couldn't just call them. The power of a face-to-face, in person visit, however, was well worth the time and has made a powerful difference on subsequent missions.

Secondly, office courtesy is about respect. Daum identifies that respected workers and leaders "find the joy in everything." The work ASA (IE&E) does has a powerful impact on the world. Again, it is easy to see from the top down that our people have a joy for their work that translates into positive office courtesy and easily leads to a powerful office culture. Many ASA (IE&E) examples come to mind, but to me the most immediate and obvious examples are our super executive assistants. No matter what is going on – good or bad – they always display a joy that leads to positive office courtesy – then to powerful office culture. They set the tone for success.

In closing, a journalist friend of mine argued that my article could have an even bigger impact if I could discuss a third and final point to bring it home strong. Therefore, my final point is to say keep up the great work with your office courtesy and please participate in the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC).

OK – that doesn't really tie in with my office courtesy theme, but as the CFC Campaign Manager, I thought I would give it a shot!