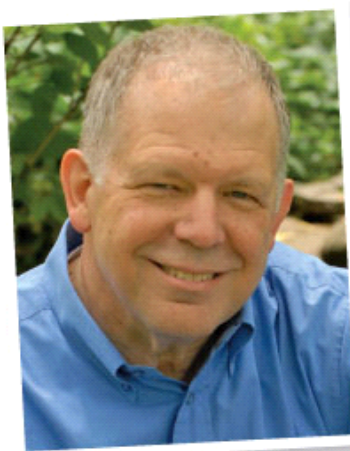


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... And Goodwill to All

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This time of year we often hear “Goodwill to all,” but what is goodwill? If you’ve bought a business, your accountants told you it’s the premium between what you pay for a company and the value of the underlying assets.

The dictionary defines goodwill as “friendly, helpful, cooperative feelings or attitudes.” Where’s that goodwill today? Our country just finished a particularly partisan political campaign with accusations hurled in every direction. We may deplore this in politicians, but in your store or your personal life, do you believe people should give each other the benefit of the doubt over past real or perceived grievances? When you leave your store are you affording others the same courtesy?

Today we tend to see everything as black and white without shades of gray. We seem to have forgotten how to explore each other’s ideas in order to find

some common ground. Talk to any participant on a debate team and they’ll tell you they’ve learned to embrace each topic dispassionately from every side. This leads them to better understand that preconceived notions may be biased, one-sided or wrong. No matter our education or experience, no one has a lock on “The Truth.”

This realization is important for you and your garden center employees, especially those dealing directly with people. (Hey? Isn’t that everyone in your garden center—fellow employees, customers, vendors?) When you think you know best in a situation, do you take a deep breath and consider the other person’s perspective?

Aggressively listen to conversations. There’s a key phrase that tells you when civil discourse is going into bitter, non-communicative squabbling. When either party starts by saying, “Did you?”—or worse, “You are a _____!” things are getting personal and headed out of control. Any question is accusatory when it puts the other person on the defensive. It inhibits truth and candid exchange of ideas. When people feel they’re being attacked they don’t focus on listening; they’re focused on defending themselves and crafting what they’ll say next. They aren’t focusing on what the other parties are saying or feeling. Going back to the dictionary, the synonyms for goodwill include “compassion, kindness, consideration and charity.” How often do our words and actions reflect them?

Consider the question, “Why did you plant the hydrangea there?” as contrasted to “That’s an interesting placement choice for the hydrangea.” The second “question” is really a statement that focuses the conversation on the spot where the plant was placed. It gives an employee a chance to explain their thinking in a less personal, less invasive way. The difference may be subtle, but it’s impactful.

As a boss or a co-worker, you may not feel that you're bullying people. If your question makes someone feel either accused or on the defensive, then the employee may feel bullied. Remember, it's the perspective of the other person that matters.

As we ponder the year-end holidays, let's make a commitment to ourselves, our families, our workplace and our community to listen more and pre-judge less. We need civil discourse, whether working with our vendors and employees or satisfying our customers. Let's talk about facts and solutions. Let's never assault, attack or accuse someone. Focus on topics, not on personalities. Let's discuss ideas and discover the other person's perspective. With the new year ahead, let's start now—with you and me and all those with whom we communicate—one conversation at a time. You've heard it before and you know it's true: If it is to be, it's up to me!

May there be peace on Earth ... and goodwill to all. **GP**

Bill would love to hear from you with questions, comments or ideas for future columns. Please contact him at wmccurry@mccurryassoc.com or (609) 688-1169.