

# Morning Assembly

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5<sup>th</sup> October 2015

## Common Courtesies

The video is really hilarious but in real life, if we examine ourselves carefully, we may have been just as insensitive as the people in the video are to others. Certainly in Hong Kong, there is no shortage of anecdotes about the lack of common courtesies, starting with not holding the door for people. This has happened to me many times and I still do not understand why this peculiar behaviour has developed. Just picture this scenario. Three people are heading for a door and I happen to be the third one. After the first person has pushed open or pulled open the door, you see this second person quickly wriggles through at lightning speed while the door is in mid-swing, half closing, without every touching the door. Since the door is already closing, I end up having the door slammed right in my face. I can almost hear the second person laughing his head off as he scurries off to whatever destination that he is going, enjoying the thought of having outmaneuvered me. At other times, it is even worse. The first person actually pushes the door slightly ajar, just wide enough for him to slip through quickly because he wants to make sure whoever is following has no chance of squeezing through. It is utterly bizarre to me, particularly when holding the door a little bit longer does not take that much energy and does not cost anything. Ballet dancing through the door takes much more effort!



What about people sneezing very loudly without covering the mouth or that beautiful lady yawning with her mouth wide open right in front of me, showing off her not-so-pleasant oral cavity? Then there is this person on the bus putting his bag on the seat beside him so that others cannot take the seat. Or those who refuse to move down inside a train carriage or bus when there is room to do so. I can go on and on to give you a tirade about these grotesque encounters.

I know, I know, you must be thinking that Mr. Yuen is 'old school'. Good manners are just social etiquette or niceties that are very trivial or not important. It is good to have them but without them, it will merely cause some minor inconveniences.

In English, we have many words for good manners such as courtesy, civility, politeness, decency, thoughtfulness, kindness, social etiquette and good conduct. No matter what we call it, good manners are anything but trivial. Good manners are not just about pulling out chairs for ladies, opening doors or saying thank you or sorry, they are actually our way of showing respect and consideration for others. It is about putting other people first, it is about putting other people at ease, it is saying that other people are more important and they deserve our care and consideration. The lack of consideration is a sign of the

“Me-first culture” in Hong Kong. I jump the queue because I am in a hurry and I have more important things to do.

Good manners are about self-control and restraint. It is much easier to use foul language to curse or shout profanity when you are angry. It is much easier to throw a tantrum by slamming the door or pushing everything to the floor when you are upset. It is much easier to scream, stomp, grab or hit someone who annoys you. It is, however, much much harder to have self-control, to stop and think about what you are doing or saying, taking others into consideration and acting accordingly. Good manners slow us down, they force us to think about others and how we would like to be treated ourselves.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 7:12 has this golden rule that governs our behaviour in society. “So in everything, do to others what you would have others do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.” (因此在任何事上，你們希望別人怎樣對待你們，你們也應當怎樣對待別人。要知道，這就是律法和先知的教導。) Similarly, the silver rule is from Confucius - “Do not do to others what you do not want done to you.” (己所不欲，勿施于人)

And I hope these are the rules that govern the way we treat each other here in St. Paul’s College. Next time when you see an adult in the school campus, whether this person is a teacher that you know, or a teacher that you don’t, a visitor or even a janitor, greet him/her by saying good morning / good afternoon, or simply just a nod. Your smile may be a ray of sunshine for people who are not happy on that day. Do not leave your rubbish everywhere, because no one is your domestic helper. Instead, pick up any rubbish left behind by others whenever you see it and treat St. Paul’s College like your home. Hold the door to prevent it from swinging back into the face of anyone who is following. Hold the door for your teachers and let them pass through before you. It is noble to show respect to your teachers. Offer your help to your lady teachers in particular if they are holding piles of books. Do not run along the corridors because we have expecting mums here in the College. Do not sleep in class (or in the assembly) no matter how tired you are because it is really disrespectful to your teachers. Come to class on time and be prepared for your lessons. Students who come to class with no classroom supplies such as a pencil, paper, books or notes, waste everyone’s time. Your classmates deserve your respect and support. Others may have different opinions from yours, they may ask questions that you perceive to be ‘stupid’, but they deserve the same level of respect from you just as you wish from others. Pay attention to the way you carry yourself. Have some class. Don’t slouch, hold your head high and have a neat appearance. Do not swear, using filthy language.

The motto of New College at the University of Oxford is “Manners makyth man”. You have heard me saying in the assembly that one of the goals of education is about becoming a man and the meaning of this motto is really in the same vein. Manners here does not only refer to courtesy or politeness. What it really means is that it is not by birth, money or

property that an individual person is defined but by how this person behaves towards others.

Hong Kong needs a generation that is respectful, thoughtful of others, gracious and considerate and I hope St. Paul's College helps to produce some of these men for the future of Hong Kong.

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