

Utah Civility and Community 2011

Seven Stages of Civility

Civility

Pass it on

SEVEN STAGES OF CIVILITY

Even at Stage One of the Seven Stages of Civility one is functioning at a level of civil behavior that rises above brute force and barbarism. Civility infers ethical behavior and the related capacity of "civic intelligence". Levels of civic intelligence bring into play the understanding and use of the stages of civility or civil reciprocity. Many are embedded in the civic framework of the United States Constitution comprised of rights, responsibilities and respect (3Rs). One might say that each higher stage of civility represents a more elevated manifestation of "civil-ization".

STAGE ONE: Win by following the rules

This stage of civility amounts to following basic rules of civility and ethical behavior. This stage is attainable by most children in grade school. So adults functioning in public and civic settings should not get too excited that they can follow the "rules of civility". All too often even this most basic level of civility is not honored in our civic and public spaces. The typical ethical and civil expectations at this level of following rules is: It is OK for me or my group to win and others to lose as long as I follow the rules. An example of Stage One Civility are rules of war where even killing is acceptable but within an agreed upon framework that averts descent in utter chaos and mutual destruction.

STAGE TWO: Contest with respect

The goal of Stage Two Civility is to respectfully contest with the goal of convincing the other party or your position but not to force your position on the other. There is no middle ground contemplated by either side, and an assumption that the triumph of your own position is critical. An intriguing outcome of deeply polarized parties respectfully listening to the other is that even though there is little chance that either side will be able to convince the other of the correctness of its position, each side begins to see the other in itself. There is often a resulting realization perhaps for the first time that "I can live with others that I am opposed to, because they are like me, even though it is important to me to continue to contest the superiority of my position."

STAGE THREE: Be responsible to respect each other's rights ("me" oriented reciprocity)

This logic of this framing of the 3Rs (rights, responsibility and respect), is that: I should be responsible to respect others rights so that they will be responsible to respect my own rights. This is "me" oriented reciprocity, the lowest stage of civil reciprocity, but the first stage when everyone wins in a sense, when one can negotiate with the flexibility of interests and not just rigid positions. This stage of reciprocity can typically be mastered in middle school. It provides an important initial framing for understanding that when rights must be mutually recognized, mutual interests can be optimized. The arena of business is a context in which stage 3 reciprocity is often modeled.

STAGE FOUR: Respect your own right to be responsible ("us" oriented reciprocity)

In Stage Four Civility one concentrates on one's responsibility to others as well as one's own rights; one is thinking of "us" and not just "me". Through this stage of civility, shared values can create a context for working out differences, which yields higher quality outcomes than Stage Three. Mutually optimizing values as opposed to just shared interests creates a deeper framework for finding common ground in the context of deeply held values. However, Stage Four Civility does not always fully take into account those whose values and even circumstances are significantly different than most others.

STAGE FIVE: be responsible to recognize all people's right to respect ("all of us" reciprocity)

Stage Five Civility is by definition global in its vision and sensibilities; it extends out to a concern for all people everywhere - or another way to phrase it, all people who might be affected by any particular decision or action. A chief ethical concern of Stage Five Civility is that general principles apply evenly to everyone, and that everyone should be treated fairly in this context. This is the standard implied in the US and State Constitutions in the United State with particular concern for every person's freedom of conscience, the "First Right" and perhaps deepest ethical concern.

STAGE SIX: be concerned about each person's particular circumstances ("each of us" reciprocity)

Stage Six Civility is a higher expression of ethics and the Golden Rule: I wish to treat you in all your uniqueness and circumstances as I would like to be treated in all my uniqueness and circumstances. In other words the general principles of Stage Five Civility do not take into the account the particular circumstances of some people, and one should even more deeply honor the particular contexts of each person and situation to fully exercise civility and ethical concerns in this deeper sense. Stage Six Civility also embraces all life and the natural world as more than being useful to human beings. So for instance one often includes some level of empathetic concern for all sentient beings and the natural environment.

STAGE SEVEN: be concerned about honoring everyone's well being in the entire spectrum of humanity (integral reciprocity)

Stage Seven Civility takes into account the full developmental spectrum of humanity and for the first time one is able to honor all authentic points of view and weave them together for the health and well being of the entire spectrum of humanity and the natural world. It reflects the context awareness of Stage Six Reciprocity and adds this more fully textured and construct aware sense of being able to appreciate and connect with complementary ways of being and doing without insisting that others share your own point of view or world space. It reflects then, an even higher manifestation of the golden rule, because everyone in every way is one's neighbor.

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