

TAKE CARE OF EVERY DETAIL & DON'T FORGET YOUR MANNERS

Over the 20 plus years I have worked in public relations or PR, there are many things I have learned – not the least of which is attention to detail and professionalism – or - dotting the i's and crossing the t's while minding your p's and q's.

And it didn't always come easy to me – it is something I work at and it is only when I review other people's work that I realise how I value its importance.

Just this week I have been working hard with my lovely work experience person to finalise itineraries for visiting journalists to get a taste of Cairns Festival and what our region has to offer. It has been a very time consuming, but enjoyable business – and hopefully it will prove fruitful with some great publicity to boot.

While this type of work and the importance of being meticulous is part and parcel of being a travel agent – it is also true of a PR person. Ensuring the correct spelling of names and accuracy of flight details is a good start, but so too is the recording of information from a venue's name and address to its telephone number. This carries on in my day to day work that largely consists of media relations. Writing and distributing some 200 plus press releases a year for the past 17 years has meant fine tuning my eye to errors while proofing and editing.

We all make mistakes and I will give you the strong tip, don't rely solely on spell check. It is always a good idea to have someone else read over your work before sending it anywhere and I have a policy that nothing is sent to media unless it has been read through and approved by the client.

I do remember a very awkward situation in my early days as a public relations consultant where I incorrectly captioned a photograph that was being sent with a personnel promotion release for one of Sydney's top advertising agencies. It all came down to not double checking the information being sent with the client – but in those days, we didn't use email – it was fax or mail – so much harder to check. Suffice to say, I got in all sorts of trouble with the egos at play.

I cannot emphasise the value of checking, and then checking again and urge everyone to employ a degree of fastidiousness in their work. Be thorough and go the extra mile in your delivery and people will thank you.

Which brings me to the p's and q's bit. P's and q's or please and thank yous are taught to us all from an early age and believe me – as a parent, it is the most underused word in the dictionary and the 'traning' part is not as easy as it sounds. It is so frustrating when your own children forget their manners and so endearing when you hear those words from one of their friends. It is a fast track to my good books and an excellent form of pr at a very domestic level.

The significance of good manners extends to the work place and it is surprising how many young people, especially, are missing the fundamentals. Think about your last visit to the supermarket check out. Was it you or the person who gave the money to that said thank you? Hopefully both, but my bet it was just you who used their manners. This is really common in restaurants and shops and it amazes me how many people don't believe the customer is always right – and don't bother to thank them for their custom. Somehow it is the customers that feel they should be the one doing the thanking – ironic, isn't it?

Another one of my pet loves is looking people in the eye – and shaking their hand – it shows the person that you are interested in them and care enough to ‘give them the time of day’.

In our jobs we are so busy and all the time vying for results. It is from one thing to the next. Often we forget to say thank you – or please. I do try, but not always remember, to recognise the support I receive from my colleagues – even if it is just in the form of considering a story idea or angle. The ‘media’ can be as much ‘feared’ as they are ‘used’ for achieving a means to an end. They, like everybody else, likes to be thanked every now and again – and no, you won’t be thought of as a brown-noser – being polite is much cooler than being impolite.

Putting one’s feet in another’s shoes is an excellent thing to do – and I often find myself considering the other person’s point of view before I begin an email or start a conversation. This is what PR is all about – practicing strategic and managed communication.

At a glance:

- Check spelling – and be especially thorough with people’s names, titles and places.
- Check detail – times, dates, phone numbers.
- Be careful to caption photographs and images correctly.
- Be consistent with formatting text and always justify.
- Always ask and don’t demand when dealing with media. Understand the nature of the media you are dealing before pitching any story ideas.
- If someone does you a favour or helps provide a result – no matter how big or small, take time to thank them.

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