

# THE SET FREE LIFE

## The Way We Were

It's a crazy world out there, and we don't know how to act anymore. It used to be everyone knew "the rules" of good behavior, but now sometimes it seems no one knows. Those of us reared by parents who wanted us to be productive citizens with good character feel like aliens in a strange land. We wonder if it means anything to be a person of quality when a United States senator thinks nothing of calling a flight attendant the *b*-word loud enough for others to hear, or if principles for living have a place in societies that wait with baited breath to see what a golfer will reveal about his personal life. We open a magazine while waiting in a doctor's office and read of celebrities' favorite sexual practices, featured as lighthearted, humorous gossip. Either this is sick or we're insane, or maybe both.

When there is no mutual goodwill in our organizations—when decorum and civility and common sense have slipped away, and people come to work looking like they simply rolled out of bed and slipped their feet into shoes, dragging themselves to work with an air of resignation and depression clinging to them like a fog, and senior managers battle for territory like dogs bred to fight while those in charge sit back and watch the carnage—then we may start to feel as though we're not reading things correctly. We do what we know to be the right thing and we're turned on as though we suggested thermonuclear war. We wonder what we're missing. We may be aware we're working in a toxic environment but we think we can handle it, when the truth is it's the insightful few who recognize the elements of an unhealthy, crippling environment and courageously refuse to be sucked in by it. I daresay that few, if any, can manage it for significant periods of time. Sooner or later, one must either leave or become one of the pod people.

Civility, along with Elvis, has left the building, although frequent sightings abound. *We don't know how to act with one another anymore.* Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young used to sing, "We've got to get back to the garden."

Here's my take: we've got to get back to teaching people what it means to come to work and do their jobs without demanding everything go as they desire. This is what social workers had to teach immigrants when they landed at Ellis Island at the turn of the Twentieth Century, bringing with them their cultures of siestas, afternoon

beer breaks, racial prejudices, and an entirely different model of work and life and commerce than their new American employers expected. They had to be instructed in the rules of conduct that would best serve them *and* benefit the men and women who hired them. Seems to me we need to start the process again, because people don't know how to act.

It's time to start teaching the concepts and principles that have been lost in the years since Viet Nam and flower power. We're working now with only the empty shells of deportment and what used to be called "breeding"; there's no substance. The shells must be filled! If we have to start conducting classes for new employees on how to carry themselves, how to respect one another, how to respond to their supervisors—let's go for it. We're willing to send managers to long sessions on diversity; why not help them understand what it means to show deference and courtesy to everyone with whom they interact? So many clearly don't know how anymore, and it would help them in their professional *and* personal lives. Why not demand good manners and behavior? Will it kill anyone to learn how to act? What if only ten percent feel like a light goes on over their heads? That ten percent can be a huge catalyst for change. Maybe we could even prevent some workplace violence by reinforcing the life lessons that are good for business, steering people thoughtfully to actions that are productive.

This is my mission, my passion—to help people become what they were *meant* to be. You know you weren't meant to be deaf and blind in matters of communication and deportment. You know your employees weren't meant to drag through their days with no sense of value. You know so much in your organization could be remedied by the return to plain old good manners and expecting people to look presentable and businesslike. Folks used to take pride in their jobs because it gave them dignity and purpose. It may seem like all that's gone down the drain, but we can rescue it before it hits the sea.

Let's bring back an emphasis on character and set the world right again! Let's fill the shells! ♪



*Sue Thompson is a personality expert, etiquette trainer, and an instructor in life lessons. Her work on recognizing and developing talent, identifying personalities and working effectively with the people who possess them, responding appropriately to difficult experiences, treating others with respect, and behaving like a professional have caused companies and business organizations throughout the country to value her consulting skills. She trains those entering the workforce how to present themselves with style and authority; new employees in the importance of respecting one's work and the workplace; managers in the value of understanding employees' talent and temperament; and everyone in the timeless rules of behavior that will always bespeak excellence.*

### Quick Links

Adopt-A-Greyhound  
Westminster Dog Show

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## Teddy Bear Says...



If you're a fan of the Westminster Dog Show, you'll know that Sadie, the Scottish Terrier, won Best in Show this year. I must admit she is a lovely little girl. Bravo, Sadie!

Show dogs have an instinct for posing for the camera. They know all eyes are upon them and they've learned through practice there is a proper way to act in the ring. They must do as they've been taught, and these champions have internalized the truth that if they please the boss and please the crowd, it's all to their own benefit. Seems that a good number of humans watching the dog shows could use that lesson!

"People just don't get it," said a character in one of Sue's favorite television dramas, featuring a woman whose dreams help solve crimes. The woman's deceased father-in-law has intimidated a possible future event that motivates his son to actions that unwittingly get him an introduction to his powerful CEO boss—which occurs due to the CEO's discovery that the husband does something in which the CEO himself believes. "People just don't get it. You want to impress the boss, you do what the boss does," the woman's departed in-law tells her as she confronts him in a kitchen vision. Her long-gone family member reminds her that when he was alive, he received promotion after promotion until he was head of his company. "My wife got mad that I was always playing golf," he laughs. "She said, 'You don't even like golf!' She sure didn't seem unhappy with the rewards that came of it!"

You all may not move in the same circles as your boss, going to the same affairs or attending to similar duties. But there is a kernel of truth in the idea that one pleases the boss when one participates in the same activities. Here's an even greater and more pertinent truth: *you'll please the boss when you do what he or she wants you to do.*

I know, it's a heavy-duty concept, but let's look for a moment at how some people interact with their bosses today. In many cases, they resent their superiors. They resent any chain of authority, and while they do their best to avoid the supervisor, when they must share oxygen they barely manage to plaster a smile on their faces and shine it on. Then they high-tail it back to their personal office

### Quotable

I am done with great things and big things, great institutions and big success, and I am for those tiny invisible molecular moral forces that work from individual to individual, creeping through the crannies of the world like so many rootlets, or like the capillary oozing of water, yet which, if you give them time, will rend the hardest monuments of man's pride.

*William James*

Contact Sue today to learn how she can meet your business needs

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cliques and talk about what a fool they have to deal with. What's worse, some of them wear their resentments on their sleeves, challenge the boss's authority, argue with him or her about the way things should be done, and make it clear that *they* should be the one in charge—not the boss.

Friends, let the Teddy Bear remind you of this all-important fact: *it is strategically foolish to treat the boss as though he or she is a loser.* Oh, I'm not saying that the boss *isn't* a loser; he or she may be wildly incompetent! And yes, that can be a chore to work with. But you are not in a position to point this out unless you are called into an even higher-up's office and asked how the boss is doing.

Here's what every dog knows: the master is the master. The master holds the food dish. The master dispenses treats. The master may be inconsistent, unfair, even unkind—but the dog is not the master and has little to no control over its situation. And when one pleases the master by doing what the master wants, life usually goes well, and often goes fabulously. When one consistently displeases the master, one may go to the pound.

You may resent this master/dog example. "My boss is not my master!" you might cry. Ah—but my friend, your boss *is* your master while you are on that job, and until you have changed that particular dynamic yourself by voluntarily leaving or by transferring to another position, then do what every great show dog does: please the boss by doing what he/she wants. It's really that simple, and it's how the world works. When you are the boss, you can see how you feel about those who want to contend with you at every turn.

Don't get sent to the pound! Act wisely. Think strategically. Consider Sadie. 🐾

## Image is Everything Except When it's Not

*You've got the education and background, and you continue to develop your skills. But unless you know how to package these assets, few will be interested in looking beyond what they can see to find out what's inside!*

*Employers are looking for—and hold onto—quality and excellence.*

*Do they know you possess it? How?*

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