



Rules of engagement

J Hattingh
PSSA President

As professionals, we all engage with fellow professionals and with the public daily. It is expected that we all understand common decencies and protocols ruling these engagements.

The fact is, the rules regarding these engagements are more complex than we realise, and they differ widely between various work and social environments. It may then easily become a bone of contention when the rules pertaining to a workplace or organisation are unwittingly transgressed.

It is often left to the senior pharmacist in the workplace (in our work-setup), or to the leaders in an organisation, to defuse the tension caused if the rules are broken. This task can be very easy when you deal with emotionally mature persons, but more often than not, this is not the case.

How does one proceed with this not-so-enviable task?

Before you start a debate with someone, ask yourself if the person is mentally mature enough to grasp the concept of different perspectives? If not, there is absolutely no point. There are those who always seem angry and continually look for conflict. Walk away – the battle they are fighting is within themselves.

At times small matters, that could have been defused over a cup of coffee, are blown out of proportion and end up in legal battles that are totally unnecessary. It is important to follow your heart where your profession is concerned and you feel strongly about the matters at hand, but do take your brain with you into the process!

For the leader or person supervising others, it is important to remember that when somebody does something wrong, do not forget all the things they did right. With that said, it is always important to determine the intent a person had when they transgressed these “rules of engagement”. At times, it is done with the best of intentions; other times, it is done without thinking about the consequences. It becomes much harder to manage and resolve when the intention was malicious. The rule for me is that nice words do not cover ugly intentions.

With our interactions, the value of boundaries cannot be overemphasised. In general, the following can be said: A boundary defines

where your responsibility ends and where another person's begins. It stops you from doing things for others that they should do for themselves. A boundary also prevents you from rescuing someone from the consequences of their destructive behaviour, that they need to experience in order to grow.

I would rather adjust my life to somebody's absence than adjust my boundaries to accommodate their lack of respect. It is true that manipulative people do not understand the concept of boundaries. They are relentless in their pursuit of what they want and have total disregard for those who get hurt in the process.

As HF Amiel said, “There is no respect for others without humility in one's self”. And to quote the Dalai Lama, “Mutual respect is the foundation of genuine harmony”.

In this respect, we all make bad decisions, and I really appreciate people who correct me. If not corrected, I could repeat the same bad decisions for years. One also needs to be clear that, even though a bad decision is made with good intentions, it is a bad decision none the less.

Brian Tracy said: “Superior leaders are willing to admit a mistake and cut their losses. Be willing to admit that you changed your mind. Don't persist when the original decision turns out to be a poor one.”

To understand and correctly apply the “rules of engagement” requires emotional intelligence and genuine goodwill. Fake friendliness won't do. I would rather work with a very difficult person, with whom I know where I stand, than with a friendly person who turns his mantle to the wind.

As the crafty Afrikaner politician CJ Langenhoven aptly said, “A man who turns his mantle to the wind makes friends all around, until, in the end, he has enemies all around.” (freely translated)

- Respect is earned
- Honesty is appreciated
- Trust is gained
- Loyalty is returned

All of the above are, like Humpty Dumpty, never restored once they have been broken.