My mother used to say “Mind your manners!” whenever we went out to dinner or visited neighbors. I suppose it was because she didn’t want others to think that we were crude or unappreciative. In the workplace, we have become much more casual with each other than generations before. There is evidence that the increased informality makes working together more natural. However, the informal nature of a social setting should not be carried over to the workplace. The familiarity of working with one another day to day can cause serious problems for the company and the work climate.

When employees and employers become too informal, they lose sight of the boundaries of acceptable behavior. Communication begins to lack basic respect. No longer are please and thank you in the dialogue. We take each other for granted and don’t express the appreciation we all deserve.

The lack of manners or polite behavior flows over to the customers. I often hear waitresses say, “Are you guys alright?” Excuse me, but I am not a guy, and do I look like something is wrong with me? But at least they asked, right?

Lack of good manners diminishes a professional attitude. Even at McDonald’s, when an order is called back to the cook, the word please is required. Not natural? It should be, and it shouldn’t have to be required. However, consistent practice makes politeness a habit.

It may not hurt to have a company meeting about the benefits of good manners. Simple things like not yelling across the room, excusing one’s self when there is an interruption, not taking phone calls while helping a customers with gardening problems, and, of course, saying please and thank you when you ask a co-worker for help. The attitude toward politeness will reflect on the image of the company. Good manners separate the acceptable from the unacceptable, and define the parameters of behaviors.

One of the ugliest social scenes that I have witnessed is spouse bashing. It is equally ugly to hear an employee bash a co-worker or boss to a customer. For example, a comment such as, “Oh, that was bad advice. He doesn’t know what he is doing.” How can a statement like encourage the customer to trust your credibility? Another tacky remark is about the deficiencies of the competition. Bashing anyone is self-defeating. The best thing employers can do for their company and organizational morale is to defend their employees. Making excuses, placing blame and bad-mouthing your employees to other employees or customers is a shot in the foot. Talking about each other is disrespectful, demoralizing and casts a fog on the climate of the company.

As an employer, the buck stops and starts with you. You can change the way people within your company treat each other. Courtesy and respect will make the workplace a pleasant place to be and encourage respect for your shoppers. People will notice. In our informal society, good manners are becoming the exception but are appreciated by all.

Emily Nolting, Ph.D., Commercial Horticulture Specialist, K-State Research and Extension