

Foreward  
**I Am No Saint**

“Would you just back off!?!”, I snapped at Marie, a well-meaning nurse. EEOOOWWWW....not the correct response from a physician who speaks on civility in the medical workplace, and author of this book. I knew it as the words left my spleen and my mouth, as I saw the shocked and hurt, then angry look on Marie’s face.

I am no saint. Although the red hair is augmented, I come by the temper genetically. Having read on anger, rudeness, and incivility a lot recently, I recognize it as a learned behavior...and one I should be able to curb.

It had been a rough day in Endoscopy...patients having been mis-scheduled due to new office staff were coming in hours early or not at all, the ER was calling with critical bleeders, the floors with inane questions and long hold times. In the midst of my latest colonoscopy, my home fire alarm went off. The monitoring service, as they should, called me (I had been having 4AM false alarms all week). However, this false alarm was at a different time than usual, so I needed the fire department to go out to my home.

It was into the midst of an urgent call from the fire chief requesting my presence at my home that Marie, all unawares, stepped.

After I completed the call (no, I would/could not go home in the middle of the tightly packed day), I took several deep breaths, and then went to find Marie. I owed her my apology.

I found Marie in the recovery area of endoscopy, releasing a different patient to home. In front of the patient and family (she deserved that at least—I had “flamed” her in the hearing of her colleagues), I apologized for my behavior.

I was astonished when Marie lit into me. A soft-spoken, helpful, heretofore meek individual, I had not heard her raise her voice or speak in her own defense. But I heard her now.

In front of the patient, she told me that she was looking out for my patient and his family, and that she felt that I should be able to control my behavior more professionally. She said a great deal more, but I’m afraid the burning of my ears blocked out all but the sting of reprimand.

I had spoken to the nursing staff on the incivility epidemic in medicine, of the poor patient outcomes and the nursing burnout that are a consequence. I had discussed several techniques to use on physicians or rude associates to curb behavior, to nip it in the bud. I had encouraged the nurses to take action immediately to alter such behavior patterns, much as one would use a newspaper to smack a puppy that piddles on the living room rug.

I was chastened....I was trained...

And I was proud, so very proud, of Marie.

**Chapter XX**  
Mind-Managing the Uncivil; or  
Curb your Docs

David, my senior partner strutted down the hall in our office, bearing a close resemblance to Balloo from Jungle Book. As he drew near, under his breath I could hear the strains of the immortal tune....”Zippidy Doo Dah, Zippity Yay....My oh my, what a wonderful day....”

Yes!!!! We'd done it! We had proven that doctors CAN be trained!

Hiding my smile, I stepped back into my office, closed the door, and called Linda, a nurse at the hospital.

Whether doctors can be trained or manipulated is not really open to question...you really don't think that the pharmaceutical industry spends so much money on pens and pads emblazoned with drug names because they want to make sure that our children have enough writing implements? No, I'm sure that a bunch of money has been spent proving that we docs are quite suggestible and subliminally directed. But now we'd proved that we could do it in a clinical setting.

The scam—we wanted to see if we could plant a song in the brain of a physician. The locale- at the endoscopy suite of our local hospital, we would have Linda, one of the two nurses staffing his room over a couple hours, hum a preselected song under her breath while working with him. We chose carefully—it had to be infectious, but not too deviant—imaging not being able to rid yourself of “It's a small world”!

It had worked, and David had no idea where the cheery tune, not heard perhaps for decades had sprung from. We had achieved mind control!

Why do you care? Well, much of the incivility that we experience comes from one on one contact--not whole group gang ups. We need to show that we can control the behavior of others, either overtly or subliminally, for a brief period of time.

Please note, David had lost the song by morning. We do not preach that we can change your overall behavior, influence the change of a life, or cure cancer. However, when I read about control of obnoxious behavior in others being impossible, that you can only change your reactions to it, I say an unqualified “Bullshit”.

Physicians are smart, and are trainable. We are at least as smart as dogs, perhaps not as smart as cats. You will not be able to affect a life change, a persona change. But you should be able to train us to act in an appropriate manner when around you, the trainer.

Lets carry this dog training analogy along further. A vicious pit bull can get trained, but is no less vicious. A retriever is trainable, but started out lovable. We do not propose to change the basic nature of the beast, just to school them in appropriate collegial behavior.

Lets talk about what usually happens when a doctor acts up. The current scenario at most hospitals is that the doctor gets “cranky”, takes it out on the nurses. The nurse speaks to the head nurse, who asks her to report it in writing to administration. Several days later, it is received in administration, reviewed by committee, and a form letter is generated after the next scheduled committee meeting (in about a month) telling the doc to be nicer to the nurses, but being very vague on details. The doctor's miffed. He/she can't recall the incident, and had someone told them of the problem, then they could have corrected their actions. Miffed, the doctor goes on rounds, and the world continues on its unending axis.

What is this like to the offending doctor in dog terms? Think of the doctor as a somewhat clueless puppy, newly aquired, who has just piddled in the middle of your new white living room rug. You're upset immediately, but don't say anything to the dog. Then one month goes by, and WHAM, out comes the rolled up newspaper! And the puppy's going....HUH? What I do? Some way to teach a dog, isn't it?

Here's the thing—you've got to hit us with the newspaper right at the time of the event if you want to make a change in our behavior. It will take a commitment on your part, but you will end up with a well-trained dog over time, at least in your home and with regards to piddling.

Thus we need to discuss techniques to train. The rolled up newspaper (figuratively please!) is quite direct, and most are not brave enough to face the offender down. However there are some oblique and even subliminal behavior modifications that you can implement to control the behavior of your docs and your more unruly colleagues.

Here they are, from easiest and least direct to fully confrontational:

1. Technique: Possession is 9/10
2. Technique: The Sylvia
3. Technique: Harmonize, don't mirror
4. Technique: Whiplash
5. Technique: Confront
6. Technique: Avoid

Possession is 9/10

You are in possession of your clinical space...we doctors are only visitors. Although it sounds a lot like one of those 1950s wifey things, have you made your unit a nice place to be? Do you greet him at the door with problems and whiny snotty children, or with his slippers, nice music, and the smells of supper?

Sometimes we're stressed (duh!) and arrive late at the unit to have no nice greeting, but an entire litany of problems cast at our feet. This is not the way to start our interaction.

How about a simple "hello" or similar greeting first, the gently launch into the problem as well as some possible solutions for it? One of the things we'd like to enhance in medicine is the collaboration in patient care of medical caregivers, so don't wait to be asked, just tell us a solution...often we'll be glad of your solutions.

Control the environment. How about music, flowers, snacks? How about a joke board, a quote of the day? How about having a clean space to work, charts that are complete with paperwork.

Not only will your docs respond favorably to this very 50s environment, it can't but make you feel better organized as well.

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