

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS of DIGNITY¹

"Treat people as they want to be and you help them become what they are capable of being."

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

- **Acceptance of Identity**—Approach people as neither inferior nor superior to you; give others the freedom to express their authentic selves without fear of being negatively judged; interact without prejudice or bias, accepting how race, religion, gender, class, sexual orientation, age, disability, etc. are at the core of their identities. Assume they have integrity.
- **Recognition**—Validate others for their talents, hard work, thoughtfulness, and help; be generous with praise; give credit to others for their contributions, ideas and experience
- **Acknowledgment**—Give people your full attention by listening, hearing, validating and responding to their concerns and what they have been through
- **Inclusion**—Make others feel that they belong at all levels of relationship (family, community, organization, nation)
- **Safety**—Put people at ease at two levels: physically, where they feel free of bodily harm; and psychologically, where they feel free of concern about being shamed or humiliated, that they feel free to speak without fear of retribution
- **Fairness**—Treat people justly, with equality, and in an evenhanded way, according to agreed upon laws and rules
- **Independence**—Empower people to act on their own behalf so that they feel in control of their lives and experience a sense of hope and possibility
- **Understanding**—Believe that what others think matters; give them the chance to explain their perspectives, express their points of view; actively listen in order to understand them
- **Benefit of the Doubt**—Treat people as trustworthy; start with the premise that others have good motives and are acting with integrity.
- **Accountability**—Take responsibility for your actions; if you have violated the dignity of another, apologize; make a commitment to change hurtful behaviors.

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THE TEN TEMPTATIONS

(How to maintain your dignity when your instincts think they know better)

1. **Don't Take the Bait: Don't let the bad behavior of others determine your own.** Restraint is the better part of dignity. Don't justify returning the harm when someone has harmed you. Do not do unto others as they do unto you.
2. **Don't get caught in the temptation to save face:** Don't lie, cover up, deceive yourself—tell the truth about what you have done.
3. **Don't shirk responsibility when you have violated the dignity of others. Admit that you made a mistake and apologize for hurting them.**
4. **Don't be lured by false dignity:** Beware of the desire for external recognition of your dignity in the form of approval and praise. If we depend on others alone for validation of our worth—we are seeking false dignity. Our dignity also comes from within.
5. **Don't be lured by false security. Don't let your need for connection compromise your dignity.** If we remain in a relationship where our dignity is routinely violated, our need for connection has outweighed our need to maintain our own dignity.
6. **Don't just sit there and take it! Don't allow someone to violate your dignity without saying something.** Stand up for yourself. Don't avoid confrontation. A violation is a signal that there is something in the relationship that needs to change.
7. **Don't assume you are the innocent victim in a troubled relationship: Open yourself to the idea that you might be contributing to the problem.** You may not be aware of it. We need to be able to look at ourselves from an outside perspective so that we can see ourselves as others see us.
8. **Don't resist feedback from others. We often don't know what we don't know.** We all have blind spots (ways that we unconsciously behave that are undignified). We need to overcome our self-protective instincts to resist constructive criticism and consider feedback as a growth opportunity.
9. **Don't blame and shame others to deflect your guilt.** Get control of the urge to defend yourself by trying to make others look bad
10. **Don't be lured by false intimacy. Beware of the tendency to connect with others by gossiping about someone else.** Being critical and judgmental about others when they are not present can feel like a bonding experience and makes for engaging conversation but it is harmful and undignified. If you want to create intimacy with others, speak the truth about yourself—about what is really happening in your inner world—and invite the other to do the same.

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