

Selfish Reasons for Civilized Behavior

The nihilist in me isn't too interested in moralizing to my children about right and wrong. Yes, I believe in ethics and morality, but no, I do not believe that we are obligated to anyone but ourselves to be good and moral people.

If we aren't obligated to anyone but ourselves, then any reason why find to be good and moral must necessarily be selfish. Right?

I think so. And after polling some friends on what they considered "civilized behavior," here are some actions and the selfish reasons to perform them.

General politeness: Saying things like "pardon me" as you brush passed or need to get around somebody in your way, and not passive aggressively / smart-ass-like, will have that person and any others around viewing you as someone who has a basic regard for other peoples' space. Not a bad way to start building your reputation, something which is very necessary when you find yourself in need of something only others can provide (favors, or trades).

Offering space to the infirm: When you're man-spreading or woman-spreading on the subway and an elderly or pregnant person gets on the train, you recognize a simple way to make their situation better by offering them space on your seat. They will immediately have feel-goods toward you and give you an in to striking up a conversation in order to become wiser about the world around you and/or to share your opinions.

Controlling the language you use: I don't have a problem with words like fuck and bitch and shit and cunt, and I prefer company with people who don't either, but many do, and going back to the reputation thing, it's often best not to use this sort of language in the company of strangers. However irrational it is to be offended by the casual use of cuss words, people do get offended by the casual use of cuss words. Minimize offense, maximize friends.

Backbiting and spreading rumors: Something about disparaging others seems to make people feel good. This is probably a symptom of a deeper problem, some lack of self-respect, or something, but if you aren't telling them to their face, then you probably don't want them to know about it. And when, more likely than if, they find out, whatever you were holding onto relationship-wise with that person will be gone. Seems foolish.

Accepting gifts willingly: Even when they suck majorly. I've received really stupid gifts before, and will no doubt continue to, but what sort of problems would it bring me to let the person know how much their gift feels like sandpaper on my scrotum? (Hey, you came to my website, I'll cuss as I please!) Many and varied. Whether they put much thought into it

or not, that gift represents a period of their life they traded for the funds to purchase it, and now they want you to have it. That must have some meaning. My advice: accept all gifts willingly and with a smile. Maybe even use it in their presence once or twice if they're around a lot. You'll keep a valued relationship, even if it's a secondary relationship, and letting it sour will cause problems with a primary relationship.

Farting on people: Back to the reputation thing. Do you want people to think you're a disgusting slob, and thereby limit your prospects for the future? If you must fart, and we must *all* fart, do it quietly when nobody's walking behind you. Crop dusting is just rude and they *will* know it's you.

Hurting people, or taking their stuff: I saved the worst for last. This should be obvious. When you hurt people or take their stuff, it makes them want to hurt you and/or take your stuff. And they'll know people who can help them. And you can develop a feud that very likely will leave you and yours worse off than before. It's better to try your darndest to keep your hands to yourself.

There are million more things I could list, but they all come back to the same reason, really: behaving unethically or immorally or uncivilized will alienate you from others and make your life harder and lonelier. And believe it or not, as a human being, you *need* others. We are a social animal and very few of us can survive long without other people to love us and relate with us and touch us and otherwise tolerate us. Do the smart thing: be good.