

Refinement



At Work



At Home

At Play

In Society

Gazing at the top of the Sistine Chapel leaves many people breathless; it is one of the most famous interior spaces in the world and the greatest of Renaissance art. The music of Bach or Mozart takes classical music lovers into another world. There was so much of intricate work involved in building the Taj Mahal. All these great works of art, music and architecture never cease to make us reflect, contemplate and be inspired no matter how many times we look or listen to them.

Refinement has the same effect on the observer. The observer is attracted to the beauty in the subject or object. St Thomas Aquinas (Medieval Theories of Aesthetics) describes beauty as “that which gives pleasure when seen”. However the word ‘seen’, he goes on to say, has an objective and a subjective meaning. The subjective value lies in the eye of the beholder, so it depends on how well the observer is trained to recognise beauty. The notion of ‘seen’ is more closely associated with the *activity* of contemplation, as St Thomas explains.

St Thomas says “If beauty is objective, then there must be some criteria by which we discover whether something is in fact beautiful.” What might the criteria for beauty be? Unfortunately, beauty is difficult to define. Tatarkiewicz (The Great Theory of Beauty and Its Decline) says “Indeed, if it is one of the transcendentals, it is impossible to give an essential definition for it. Nonetheless, there are some great pre-modern theories about the beautiful. The great theories of beauty generally agreed that it consists of unity, proportion, equality, harmony, and order. “

With this criterion in mind we can evaluate and seek the beauty in refinement.

- Refinement has both intrinsic and extrinsic benefits. It is often said that external disorder is the overflow of internal disorder. “External actions flow out of internal life of goals and commitment” G.L.Gibson (Not the way you thought it would be). The converse is also true.

From the above we can see that refinement is an art that needs to be mastered. Michelangelo practiced till he found perfection, so did Bach and Mozart. It is not difficult to see both the intrinsic and extrinsic benefits to these great composers, artists and architects.

- Refinement is a duty of Charity. No athlete would compete in competitive sports without his/her eyes on winning, or at least to achieve a personal best. A musician would not be appreciated if the tunes that came from his/her instrument were out of tune. In the same way, because we are social beings we are called to uplift society by our appearance, actions, behaviour, opinions, wisdom, understanding etc. As Saint Augustine said “to seek the highest good is to live well (Learning the Principles and Practices of Ethical Leadership)

How then can we live with Refinement at Work, at Home, at Play and in Society

At Home:

- The way we dress: Casual comfortable clothes and footwear to be worn. No unironed or torn clothes, no bare feet and certainly no clothes that show disrespect for others living with you (modesty).
- Meals: James Stenson quotes” If children are led to practice etiquette at home--by the parents' example and their own repeated practice--they will internalize these details of civilized behaviour to form lifelong virtuous habit.” (Table manners for the Home). Show temperance, dress adequately (no swimming costumes), keep an eye to see what someone at the table may need, keep up a good conversation (a boring person brings down the atmosphere), make sure you appreciate the effort of the person who put the meal together.
- Shared activity. One holiday, when our children were younger we packed away all computers and brought out our board games. The children remember that as their best holiday.
- Prudence: Be aware that someone may have had a bad day, or perhaps under the weather and so try to give that person a little more attention or more space whatever helps.
- Time: Quality time comes from quantity time. When someone comes home take a break from everything else make that person welcome and attentively listen to what they have to say about their day.
- Encourage good hobbies: Reading good books, visits to art galleries, helping others and other forms of charity are a good start.
- Room: No room should look like a hurricane has hit it. We learn to put away toys, clothes, shoes and make our beds.
- Punctuality: Never keep the whole family waiting in the car because one person has disregarded a time deadline. Come home at a promised time or ring to say you are later than expected.
- Moderation: Always practise moderation. None of us need to dig into a chip packet every time we pass by it. Wake up to an alarm even on holidays. Choose a program on TV rather than switch channels to see what is on.

At Work:

- In daily work, whatever it may be, real professionals show inner strengths and attitudes -
- sound judgment, know-how, business savvy, mature responsibility, problem-solving perseverance and ingenuity, along with what people call "class."
- Show self-respect in your work. Be conscious that work reflects your inner character. Work is, among other things, a statement of your personal commitment to excellence of performance.
- See work as service to others. Labour toward the betterment of other people, directly or indirectly: clients, customers, employers, colleagues.
- Make efficient use of resources, especially time. Know how to concentrate mind and will on the tasks before you. Work quickly but not hurriedly. Be careful but not slow.
- Personal integrity is crucially important in business. Tell nothing but the truth and always keep your word.
- No matter what it takes, be on time for all business appointments. If possible, arrive a few minutes early. No matter how late you work, get to your job on time.
- Take care of the company's resources -- money, cars, office supplies, travel accommodations, computers -- as if they were your own.
(From James Stenson. Professionalism and workplace savvy)

At Play:

- At social functions, picnics, events etc. dress to suit the occasion neither be over nor under dressed.
- Keep a good conversation going and attentively listen before passing comments.
- Never argue and try to enforce personal views.
- Show etiquette in language and gestures. Open the door for the person before or after you.
- Never get drunk or lose self-control
- Participate in group activities looking interested even if you are not.
- Ask if you can serve someone a cup of tea or a drink if you are going to get one.
- Seek newcomers to the group and make them feel comfortable.

In Society:

- Show your children how much you think about others and how well you respect the rules of the land
- Respect the wisdom, age and experience of elders
- Visit elderly relations with the children regularly
- Show patience, kindness and empathy for the disadvantaged
- Help families in need
- Appreciate leaders for the good that they do.
- Respect the law of the state i.e do not litter, obey traffic rules, do not damage public property
- Make a stand against that which is morally, ethically and spiritually wrong



The direction we and our families take largely depends on how well we “see “beauty and how well we practice the rules that guide us towards Refinement

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