



sandy says

>> R-E-S-P-E-C-T

Respect, in a way, is like the old joke about pornography made by Justice Stewart in *Jacobellis v. Ohio* (1964): "I can't define pornography, but I know it when I see it."

Lately, I have been thinking about respect. I can't offer a great definition, but I know it when I see it. Merriam-Webster defines respect as "an act of giving particular attention: consideration," or "the quality or state of being esteemed."

I'm not in love with either of those definitions, but I can't offer a better one. To me, the notion of respect is part and parcel of our humanity, and includes respect for ourselves, each other, the environment, our history and ideals, our culture and those of others, etc.

I've been struck over the past 6-8 years by a general lack of respect. It shows in the way we drive, the way we communicate, even in the way we enjoy sporting events. We see it in the way we react to people we've never met and who live half-way around the world. Sometimes, I'm pleasantly surprised to hear of strangers coming to another person's rescue. More often than not, I'm dismayed to hear of someone being shot for \$2.

In a contentious election year, a general lack of respect often reared its ugly head. Very few politicians seemed to want to take the high road – by acting respectful and foregoing name-calling and half-truths – and if they did, they often lost.

What brought this issue to a boil for me – it's been in a slow simmer for a while – were the calls and e-mails we received about our coverage of the 2008 presidential election. In election years past, we've showcased either the winner or both candidates on the cover of our November or December issue. Inside those issues, we described, with as much detail as was available, how we and others thought the president-elect would handle worker safety and health issues and speculated about

who might be tapped to head the Department of Labor and serve as assistant secretaries for OSHA and MSHA.

This year, our election coverage, which fairly closely mirrors past coverage, was met with a firestorm. Since articles appeared in print and online, I have been called a liberal (Sorry, but as I don't find either "liberal" or "conservative" to be dirty words, that slur didn't sting.); a "Commie;" a "bleeding-heart, liberal, Commie;" "ignorant;" "too stupid to look past the liberal media bias;" a "moron;" an "idiot;" and several other words and phrases that although colorful and educational, really can't be printed here.

These readers have been highly critical of a president-elect who has yet to take office as of this writing and who, quite frankly, is stepping into a world of hurt beset with an expensive, deadly and unpopular war; high unemployment and foreclosure rates; a floundering economy; creeping negativity; government corruption scandals; and numerous other challenges.

I have to ask myself: Why the negativity? Why now, when our election coverage this year isn't fundamentally different than in past years?

One reason for such an outpouring is, I believe, our increasing ability to provide immediate commentary via message boards, blogs, e-mail and online reader response tools. People are finding it easier and feeling more empowered to state their opinions than ever before (a benefit) and are doing so in hateful ways due to their ability to remain anonymous (a drawback).

That said, if you want to disagree with me or President Obama's policies, you are welcome to do so, but I'd advise you to give me a more educated reason than calling our president a racial slur.

When I hear or read such comments, my knee-jerk reaction is, quite frankly, to shut down any further discussion. To me, it is an indication that some people cannot tolerate the idea of a multi-cultural president, who identifies as an African-American and who has Hussein as a middle name. By speculating about his administration, they feel I am giving him a voice in their world – according to them – and that is unacceptable to them. (And to every Democrat or Independent who walked around during the 8 years of the Bush administration proclaiming, "He's not my president," you annoy me too.)

I have no doubt that over the next 4 or 8 years, EHS TODAY will question decisions made by President Obama and his administration. Our coverage is not predicated on the eloquence of Obama's speeches or the number of magazine covers on which his family appears. Our coverage will be based on decisions made by his administration regarding worker safety and health and the environment.

You are free to agree or disagree with me (and Obama). Just don't call me an idiot, a \$%&*#! lover or a (expletive deleted) moron. And please treat your fellow posters on our Web site with respect. They're entitled to their opinions too, so please agree that it's OK to disagree.

Otherwise, I'm going to have to buy a bumper sticker I recently spotted: "Losing faith in humanity, one person at a time."

EHS

Send an email with your thoughts to sandy.smith@penton.com.