

Ethical qualities adaptable to any era

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Today we live in times of social change. While we may cherish long-held ethical values, nonetheless the societies we live in today are different from those in which our parents were raised.

The old values of hard work, honesty, dependability, respect for others, kindness, generosity and courtesy are still good values. What have changed are the societies we live in and the customs and expectations of the people with whom we interact. In my youth, it was a treat to get a carefully hand written letter sent through the mail, delivered within a week.

But today, if I get an email from a friend sent to me a few seconds ago along with perhaps up to 20 or more recipients, most of whom I do not know, I can at least be grateful I am one among my friend's many acquaintances. If I receive a text message from a youthful friend I realize the old rules of punctuation and sentence structure and upper and lower case letters have disappeared. As a former teacher, this gives me a moment of pause to consider where the rules of good grammar have gone. Nonetheless, I am happy to learn from my young friend what he is eating for his lunch and how he is spending his time during a spare period in his Grade 10 class.

Being a senior citizen is not all that bad. Sometimes courteous bus drivers reach out to take my hand as I board the bus. They will often assure me the bus I am on is the correct bus to get to my destination. They may even tell me in advance that the next stop is the one where I should exit. When I am entering a store younger people, and most people are younger than I, often hold the door open for me. I have noticed, too, that women will hold the door open as well as men do and this helpful trend makes me happy.

There are still some nasty people around who are not very honest. About once a year, I get a phone call from someone who claims to work for Canada Revenue Agency. I am told I owe more tax money and I have only a few hours to return the phone call and get this matter straightened out to their satisfaction or risk being taken into custody by local police.

A few years ago I was phoned by a fake police officer who stated that my son was involved in a car accident. Later, the same caller pretended to be an attorney who claimed he could get my son's charges dropped for using his cellphone while driving. Still later, I found this was a scam to get me to send him money for his dishonest "help."

My son had not been in a car accident at all. It was a totally despicable, dishonest, unethical scam. Honesty is still a valued ethic in modern societies just as it has been in our past.

With patience and effort we can learn to apply long standing ethics to changing times.

Here is a list of qualities I still regard as valuable human ethical behaviour:

Kindness, caring, empathy, generosity and helping others are on my list. Honesty, truthfulness and dependability are included. Respect for others even when they are different from me in their religious or secular views or their racial origins or their personal sexual orientations, these qualities are still included in my ethical list. We are all part of the human family.

As societies change and new knowledge emerges, we will have to be open-minded about how we can apply our ethical values when looking at new medical knowledge or considering climate change or environmental protection and preservation. We need also to consider how to find new sources of energy and how to use available energy safely, responsibly and ethically.

We need not throw out our old ethical value systems, but we do need to be thoughtful about how to apply our old ethics to changing times and modern societies.