

Good manners, bad manners

Posted by Peter 7 July 2011

We have a saying in English “Manners maketh man”. “Maketh” is an old form of “makes” or “make”. So the expression means that, if you want to be a real man, you have to have good manners.

“Manners” means the way that you behave to other people, particularly in public. If you have good manners you are [polite](#) and [courteous](#). You remember to say “please” and “thank you”. You make people feel welcome and [at ease](#). And if you have bad manners you are [rude](#) and discourteous. You say unpleasant things to people. You make them feel unwelcome and upset.

If someone has good manners, we can say that they are “well mannered”; and if they have bad manners, we can say that they are “bad mannered” or “ill mannered”.

Now let’s meet Heidi Withers. She is 28 years old and works as a personal assistant in a company in London. She is [engaged](#) to be married to her boy-friend, Freddie Bourne. Freddie runs a business that sells bicycles and parts for bicycles on the internet. Recently, Heidi and Freddie went to visit Freddie’s father and step-mother, who live in Devon in the south-west of England. Most people are nervous about their first meeting with their future father-in-law and mother-in-law. Most people would be polite and well mannered. They would try to create [a good impression](#). Maybe Heidi tried to do these things. However, it did not work. Freddie’s step mother, Carolyn Bourne, thought that Heidi was rude and bad mannered.

After the end of the visit, Carolyn thought that it was important to tell Heidi about her bad manners. She said to herself, “If I don’t tell her, she will never know.” So she sent Heidi an e-mail. “It is [high time](#) someone explained to you about good manners,” she started, “because it is obvious that you don’t have any”.

She went on to talk about some of the terrible things that Heidi did:

Heidi stayed in bed too long.

Heidi complained about the food.

At meals, Heidi started eating before other people.

Heidi made jokes about Freddie’s family.

Heidi did not send Carolyn a card to thank her for her hospitality.

Carolyn also had things to say about Heidi’s plans for her wedding. Heidi and Freddie plan to get married in a castle. Carolyn does not think that this is a good idea. ? She wrote, “No one gets married in a castle unless they own it. It is [brash](#), [celebrity](#) style behaviour.” Carolyn thinks that, because Heidi’s parents do not have a lot of money, it would be better for Heidi and Freddie to have a smaller, less expensive wedding.

What would you do if your future mother-in-law sent you an e-mail like this? Perhaps you would [burst into tears](#). Perhaps you would send a reply to say how sorry you were about your behaviour and how very much you wanted to have a good relationship with your husband’s family. Heidi did not do this. Instead, she sent copies of the e-mail to her friends. And her friends sent the e-mail to their friends. And a few days later, the story was on lots of websites and in the newspapers, and we were all talking about it. Heidi’s father told the newspapers that Carolyn was [haughty](#) and [arrogant](#). (Actually, he said some rather ruder things than that, but it would not be polite to repeat them on a respectable website like Listen to English).

Freddie’s mother, and Heidi’s friends, and all sorts of other people, told the newspapers what they thought. Only Freddie, Heidi’s boyfriend, was sensible enough to keep quiet.

What do you think? Who has the worse manners – Heidi or Carolyn? And will Carolyn be invited to the wedding, and will there be a fight if she goes? It is all very exciting!