

GREEN BAY PRESS-GAZETTE

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Represent workplace positively at all times

By syndicated columnist ANDREA McKAY

This may sound silly, but I never fail to be shocked when the driver of a car pulls alongside or in front of another vehicle, rolls down the window, sticks a hand into public view and lifts the third middle finger with a cruel and wild animal-like ferocity at that other driver.

“I can’t believe he/she did that!” I say out loud. Every time. Especially if it’s meant for me, which it was on a recent Thursday as my husband and I were driving down an unfamiliar road, signaling to move into the right lane. We didn’t since no driver would allow it.

What had we done? Apparently, we inconvenienced the finger-pointer at the mere thought of having to slow down to let in a fellow traveler.

This pointer, who sped up then fiercely shoved her vehicle in front of us to let us know who’s who and what lunkheads we are, is a spanking new graduate of a local high school. How do I know?

She advertises it.

The words, “Class of 2011” and the name of her high school — which I will refrain from mentioning so as not to embarrass anyone — are scrawled in 12-inch letters across the back window of her SUV, now smack dab in front of our faces.

Since this is the time of year when young folks graduate school to move onto other endeavors like higher education or the adult world of work, I feel obliged to offer advice.

It is this: Surprise me.

- Surprise me and every boss, boss’s boss, co-worker, client and customer you’ll have over the years by being different.
- Surprise us by remembering at all times — whether on Facebook or face to face, that now that you are out in the world representing our school or company, whatever you do and say reflects on us.
- Surprise us by knowing that how you treat others will come back to you.
- Even if there’s nothing in it for you, offer to help co-workers and people who work in other departments.
- Surprise us by being wiser than those who stand around water coolers or wherever people stand around at your company and gossip. Walk away.
- Surprise us by not speaking ill of your boss or your boss before her to potential employers and others because you understand that doing so is a reflection on you.
- Surprise us by responding when we reach out to you. Answer emails and call people back on the phone.

As historian Kenneth T. Jackson told the 2011 graduating class of Wagner College recently, “Along the road, be gracious, gentle and polite.”

Just simply delight me by walking around in the world of work and outside it with the understanding that you are not the only one out here.

Make the fellow travelers you will encounter and who can help you — or not — want to say: “I can’t believe she did that! She is special and will go places.”