

Commentary...

# A tragic new normal on display at the grocery store

By Carol Statton  
Correspondent

Our world today feels like it is spiraling out of control. Locally, nationally, and worldwide, there are so many things that seem to be elevating to a degree never experienced before. Stress levels are intensifying, and because of that, we are seeing disrespectful and potentially harmful human behavior being triggered.

Last Friday, while waiting at a Safeway deli counter, I witnessed such behavior and it made me understand my own increasing anxiety at a deeper level. This encounter also made me realize that we all need to be the best version of ourselves, no matter what.

Imagine overwhelmed and understaffed employees, trying their very best to do the job that would normally be handled by three times as many people. Employees that have been working like this for months. Trying so hard, despite incredible fatigue. Finding patience when met with myriad of impatient souls. Doing their best even when there isn't enough supply to meet the

needs.

While I waited in line, I noticed an agitated man approach the counter. Suddenly, this man started spewing expletives as he looked at some empty bowls within the salad case. The man was interrogating the poor young boy behind the counter as to why the "expletive" there wasn't a plentiful amount of every choice.

He yelled the "F" word at this boy repeatedly. The boy came around the counter to explain to the man that even the delivery trucks don't have enough workers and that they just aren't getting stock. More "F" words — but now they weren't being directed to the boy, but about the condition of life with all the worthless people in the world.

The boy continued to look up into the face of the man who was towering over him, determined to defuse this hostile situation. He succeeded and the man got his large container of coleslaw and headed off for other parts of the store. The boy just stood there, staring into the great unknown, trying to regain his composure.

This young man came to me next and I could feel the fear he had just pushed through in order to handle the situation. He looked maybe 15 years old (I found out later that he is a very young-looking 20-year-old). I wanted to give him a hug and tell him this wasn't representative of the whole world — but I could tell he needed to just focus on fulfilling my order and continue pushing through. I thanked him wholeheartedly, trying to communicate my anguish over what he had just endured.

So much is escalating. The idea of control is evaporating. Stress and fear are building, and even just seeing limited supplies of what we are used to having can trigger an unbalanced response.

That man's unleashed attack was an example of what can come from feeling vulnerable. His choice of words and lack of self-control were completely out

of line, making others feel uneasy and unsafe. However, a young boy behind the counter kept his calm and did what he felt he should do, and somehow, the situation did not escalate further. It could have, and knowing that made me feel terrified; terrified that as things continue to spin out of control, more of these encounters will happen. Worse things could happen.

When we as humanity lose sight of our responsibility to one another, we lose sight of decency. Decency means we don't attack one another. Decency means we respect and value one another, no matter what our differences may be. Decency means we care. We *must* care — for one another and for the world that we all call our home.


If we run out of potato salad at the deli counter, we must remember that this is not the end of the world. If we treat it as such, we cause untold damage.

I pray for the young boy; pray that he doesn't let this encounter scare him and make him afraid for tomorrow. I pray for humanity, that we can regain our collective heart and realize that each of us affects the whole. I pray for the ability to find my own way back to believing in the best of humanity, and not giving in to a fear I have never known before.

And as for my own way of trying to right the wrong of another, I went back to Safeway the next morning and relayed all of the details of that experience to the manager, conveying how that young man deserved to be commended for his dedicated and mature efforts. Sadly, I realized that this had certainly not been an isolated instance, as the manager was not surprised by my report.

This must be the new norm. How tragic that is.

I was assured, however, that the brave young man would be rewarded.

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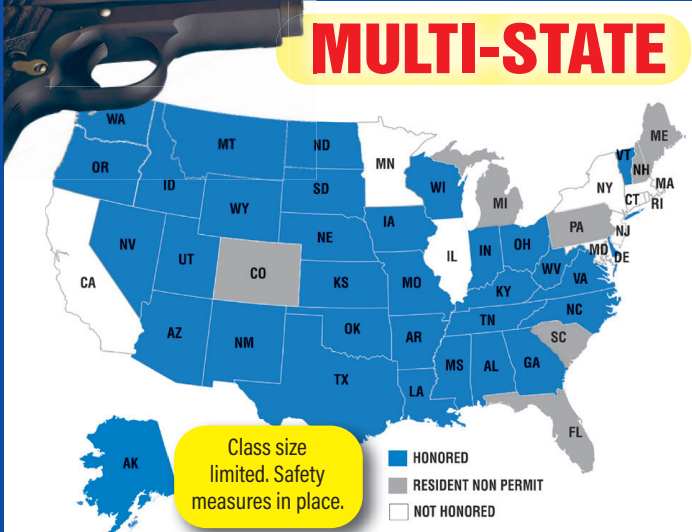
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