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In my opinion

Where *everybody* knows your name

"Thank you, Mrs. (pause) Kekeke...KEPner, is it?"

This type of thing may have happened to you too. In line at the grocery store, purchases made, you are handed your receipt. The clerk makes a "friendly" attempt to refer to you by name.

"No, it's Nepper," I reply, "like KNife."

"Oh, sorry Mrs. Knee-per."

I shrug. This is not worth a 20 minute conversation.

On to the video store.

"See ya back here Wednesday, AnneMarie!"

I turn around. Funny, I didn't recognize the girl when I was checking out. Did I go to high school with her? No way, she looks far too young. This is the first time I've ever seen this person in my life. But, apparently, we are on a first-name basis. And I won't be seeing this stranger on Wednesday; I'm far too cheap for that. I'll be back tomorrow for my dollar credit.

I first noticed this phenomenon three years ago. After ringing up my groceries at a local chain supermarket, the clerk asked me if I had a Club Card. I did indeed, and began to rattle off my phone number. The clerk interrupted me before I could finish, with a terse, "No, no, no, we don't do that anymore. We have to scan the card."



ANNEMARIE KNEPPER
WORKS ON PAPER

When pressed for details as to why, the clerk explained that the new company policy is to thank every customer by last name. Having a customer's phone number spoken aloud followed by their last name was a privacy and safety risk. Makes sense. Except that the entire issue would be null if it weren't for the policy of addressing customers by name.

I understand that these service workers are just trying to do their jobs. It would be vain and silly to believe that our 30 second exchange moved them to want to be my best friend. I'm sure management made the name usage decision. It's possible the workers feel equally uncomfortable with the situation. So why are so many service providers jumping on the "proper name" bandwagon?

It seems to this customer that they are trying to create a false sense of familiarity, a "homey-ness," in a cold warehouse-like setting. An instant bond between two strangers that, they

hope, will result in repeat business with the customer.

Well I just can't buy that. Here's why: Giant chain stores are finally waking up to the fact that people crave intimacy. I believe people actually do want to feel at home in their neighborhood grocery store. They want a friendly environment in which they can shop. Bully for that. But the sad reality is that the "neighborhood corner grocery store" doesn't exist anymore in most cities. Trying to create that feel by pretending that the store clerks actually know each individual customer is an exercise in futility, not to mention somewhat demeaning to the customer's actual value as a human who deserves to be known.

Instead of creating a genuine sense of community and friendliness by taking an interest in the customers' more complicated needs, the service providers are taking the easy route, jumping past the whole paying attention thing and just reading the customer's name off a computer. The result is far from the intention. The customer does not become a friend, or even a store patron. The customer becomes nothing more than a Club Card number.

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Guest commentary

Professor John Baldwin leaves lasting impression on University

When I arrived at the University campus in the fall of 1990 to do graduate work in the Environmental Studies Program, it was immediately evident that Professor John Baldwin was the environmental "big man" on campus. That was the year he founded the Institute for a Sustainable Environment and began serving as its director. He had just stepped down as head of the Environmental Studies Program, a program he was instrumental in establishing.

The next year, he became president of the North American Association for Environmental Education and went to Rio de Janeiro for the UN Conference on Environment and Development (still one of the great landmark environmental events).

His Introduction to Environmental Studies class was popular among students seeking enlightenment on the state of our natural world. Most students got much more than they bargained for. John's lectures were often stunning, jaw-dropping and eye-popping, as young minds began to grasp the scope and magnitude of our global environmental crisis.

John was an extraordinary speaker who could bring together vast amounts of information to make a compelling and dynamic performance. He was always accessible and available to meet with students and often followed his students' progress after graduation, helping them in any way he could. Thankfully, the Oregon Student Public Interest Research Group recognized him with an award for excellence in teaching in 1991.

He studied zoology and wildlife

ecology, and as part of his doctoral work he helped to run a reserve for sandhill cranes. One day a station wagon came down the dirt road toward the visitors' center driven by a man with his two kids. The man rolled down his window and asked John what the purpose of this reserve was. John explained the mission to protect the cranes' dwindling marsh and wetland habitat. The man asked, "Well what are these cranes good for anyway?" John gave a lengthy explanation about the magnificent sandhill cranes, their limited habitat, their long migrations, the vulnerability of their species and so forth. The man was still perplexed. "But are they good to eat?" he finally asked. John leaned over to him and said, "Are your children good to eat?"

He was a big-picture thinker. No field of study was outside his reach, be it science, philosophy, business or politics. He knew the past and the present and used them to shape the future. He never got lost in the details, but never lost sight of them either. John keynoted many international environmental conferences around the world and accepted virtually every invitation to speak on environmental topics.

John wrote the best early book on environmental planning in 1984, "Environmental Planning and Management," and co-authored "Corporate Environmental Policy and Government Regulation" in 1994. As an associate professor in Planning, Public Policy and Management, he taught courses on environmental planning and impact analysis, world energy policy and planning, sustainable development, and

Oregon's land use program. He served twice as PPPM department chair.

John's outspoken intellectual honesty was one of the qualities I appreciated most. Environmental figureheads often get caught up in a "feel-good" version of environmentalism. This version is intended to appeal to a wide audience by telling people what they want to hear: We can solve the world's environmental problems if we simply switch to recycled stationery or drive smaller cars. But this is fundamentally misleading. At best, these strategies will gain us a few moments to actually address the real problems. As long as human population and consumption keeps expanding, we will continue to push other species off the planet until our ecological support system is completely overwhelmed. John made it clear that the time for action is now.

"Look at your hand!" he would implore of his students. "Your hand is made from dirt. Your body is just a step or two on the food chain from the soil we walk on. You're a product of the earth." John was more the pragmatic realist than the sentimentalist or romantic, so I don't think he was preoccupied with matters of his own death. "Dust to dust" and cycles-of-life were more his philosophy.

John shocked us all by passing away March 7 of an undiagnosed illness. John made a real difference in this world and will always be an inspiration to those who knew him. We will dearly miss his clear voice, brilliant mind and hearty laugh.

Eben Fodor lives in Eugene

Editorial

Weapons proliferation reveals Bush hypocrisy

Hypocrisy and the U.S. government are terms which certainly go hand in hand, but this one really takes the cake.

An ongoing federal investigation has discovered Pakistan may have illegally purchased U.S. nuclear technology through an Islamabad businessman said to have ties to Islamic militants. According to the Los Angeles Times, "U.S. law prohibits the sale of equipment that can be used in nuclear weapons programs to Pakistan and some other countries as part of the effort to curb nuclear proliferation."

Now get this. During the federal investigation into Pakistani weapons technology on one side of the White House, the Bush administration was busy with its own task — promising Pakistan the sale of F-16 fighter jets from the U.S. as a reward for Pakistan's cooperation in the War on Terror. Pakistan requested the technology to build up the country's defenses; however, Pakistani Information Minister Shaikh Rashid Ahmed has firmly articulated that the sale of the jets is not dependent on a reduction in Pakistan's nuclear weapons program.

And that's not all. According to the Associated Press, "Mindful of the fragile balance of power in South Asia, the administration also gave a green light to India for its own purchase of sophisticated weapons."

Well, just as long as it's fair.

Both amusing and disturbing here is this fact: Federal money is funding an investigation into Pakistan's purchase of nuclear technology in an effort to crack down on nuclear programs, but investigators could easily walk down the hall into the Oval Office, slap someone, and achieve the same effect. The Bush administration is effectively speaking out against an arms race while sneaking up and injecting both competitors with a hearty dose of steroids.

The message is that nuclear technology is acceptable, as long as it is in the interest of the United States. Technology purchased from militant groups deserves an in-depth investigation, but technology from the United States is a bountiful reward, an agent of balance.

Our government must recognize that nuclear weapons are not a bargaining chip. Luckily, Congress still needs to sign off on the export of this technology before either country can receive the F-16s. Congress must make a decisive stand against this inane decision and affirm that the power to wipe out entire nations, not to mention the planet, belongs in the hands of no one.

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