

# The 7 Languages of Respect

How and why generations communicate respect very differently

By Michael McQueen



In 1992, bestselling US author and relationship counselor Gary Chapman wrote a revealing and landmark book which would go on to sell over 5 million copies and be translated into 38 languages worldwide. Entitled *The Five Love Languages* this one book has been credited with saving countless thousands of relationships and enriching millions more.

The basic premise of *The Five Love Languages* is that much of the conflict, hurt and miscommunication in relationships is not due to the fact each party doesn't genuinely love the other, but rather that the way each *expresses* and *receives* love is often vastly different. Drawing on over 3 decades of experience counseling feuding couples, Chapman suggests that there are in fact 5 distinct love languages that include quality time, physical touch, acts of service, words of

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affirmation and gifts. Chapman suggests that conflict will undoubtedly arise if, for instance, one party in a relationship communicates love through doing things for the other (acts of service), while the other party is actually craving physical touch or quality time as an expression of love. The key to building 'relational equity' in the above example would be for both parties to recognize that they communicate love differently and make deliberate efforts to show love in a way that is meaningful to the other.

Running a workshop at a conference recently, it struck me during the discussion that perhaps the same thing is occurring in classrooms and schools on a daily basis. I suspect that both students and teachers often *feel* disrespected by the other not because either party intends it, but rather because the languages of respect that each use are vastly different.

Having spent much of the last 5 years working with both sides of the teacher/student equation in schools around the world, I wanted to explore this issue and perhaps give a blueprint for communicating respect in a way that is understood and valued across the generation gap;

## The 7 languages of respect for *teachers*

Teachers tend to feel respected when their students:

1. **Use formal titles** and surnames. It is often important to older generations if they see respect as a function of title, role or position.
2. **Show trust** by asking teachers for advice or input. Teachers feel valued and respected when students treat them as real people with experience and wisdom.
3. **Comply** with simple rules and expectations. Many teachers describe the failure of students to arrive on time, submit work or return permission notes as highly disrespectful.
4. **Maintain order and quietness** in the classroom tends to be an unspoken indicator of respect for the teacher.
5. **Listen actively** and engaging in learning indicates a value placed on the information being taught as well as the person sharing it.

6. **Acknowledge them outside of school.** Teachers report feeling respected when students are courteous, open and friendly in interactions outside the school be it at the shopping centre or a local football game.
7. **Use an appropriate tone of voice** is one final but highly significant way students can be deliberate in their communication of respect to teachers. Many times it is the off-handed, flippant or even brash tone of voice that students adopt when speaking to teachers that causes the greatest offence. In reality, it is not what is said or even what is intended, but how it comes across that truly matters.

## The 7 languages of respect for *students*

Students tend to feel respected when their teachers:

1. **Greet them warmly** when they walk into the classroom. This is a very simple way to establish rapport and a sense of connection particularly when a student's name is used in the greeting.
2. **Give responsibility** to students by asking them to organize events, lead group discussions or even set up the classroom technology for a lesson. Setting a high expectation for students will often bring out their best and indicate a teacher's trust.
3. **Ask for input and ideas** from students. This indicates that the teacher values the students' suggestions, ideas and creativity.
4. **Allow for flexibility** in how the classroom runs. This can often be very effective as it makes the young people feel as if they are being treated like adults.
5. **Are willing to be authentic and vulnerable.** This speaks very loudly to Gen Y students who will most respect adults who are genuine with them. If teachers are brave enough to be a real person in front of students, this communicates respect and trust very loudly.
6. **Listen to their stories and experiences.** Today's students love to share their stories, feelings and experiences. By allowing them and even encouraging them to do this, teachers communicate that they value students' experiences and perspective rather than dismissing them as naïve or childish.
7. **Take an active interest** in the lives of students *outside* the classroom. This will tend to show that teachers see pupils as *people* and not just students.

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Respect is the foundation to any effective cross-generational communication. For Gen Y, respect is the currency of relationship. It must be earned and will tend to be given based on whether it is relationship driven and reciprocal and not on title or role.

Although respect must be a two-way exchange between teachers and students, it will often be the teacher who needs to take the first step. It is therefore critical that teachers understand what makes their students feel respected and also what will communicate respect in return – in many cases young people don't mean to show disrespect to older generations but fail to understand how their actions and attitudes are perceived.



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Having presented to over 140,000 people across 5 continents since 2004, Michael has his finger on the pulse when it comes to emerging trends shaping business and culture.

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