



The Solari Report

July 19, 2018

Good Manners with Daniel Post Senning





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C. Austin Fitts: Ladies and gentlemen, it is a real pleasure to welcome to The Solari Report Daniel Post Senning who is a member of the Emily Post Institute and the great-great grandson of Emily Post, author of a book called *Etiquette* with various subtitles in the many editions, now in the 19th edition.

Dan, as he goes by, is the co-author of the 19th edition, which I have here. Before I bring him in, I want to mention that also here is the 3rd edition, which I was raised on. The one that I have was published in 1939. After the 1st edition had gone through 17 printings, the 2nd edition went through 25 printings, and the 3rd edition started in 1937, and I have a copy of the 8th printing, in the fall of 1939.

It's fair to say that this is a book which has taken the world by storm. I think that it is one of the most successful books, and certainly the most valuable book that we have seen come from America.



The Emily Post Institute keeps that tradition going, and Daniel has several books to his credit, one which is very important for this conversation, which is on digital manners in an online society. Dan, before we begin, I have to note that your college degree is in molecular biology, and given what it takes to apply etiquette to a digital world, I have to tell you I think that is the most appropriate background for what you now do with the Emily Post Institute.

So welcome to The Solari Report and thank you so much for joining us.

Daniel Post Senning: Thank you for having me and thank you for that warm and generous introduction. I really appreciate it.

Fitts: Tell us a little about the Institute's work and all the resources that are available.

Senning: The Emily Post Institute, as you mentioned, is a five-generation family business. It was founded by Emily, my great-great grandmother, to promote etiquette and civility in America, primarily through the continuing publication of book etiquette, which – as you noted – has gone through a series of evolutions. It's now gone through 19 editions, and we are preparing to begin the writing process of the 20th edition for release in 2022 for the 100-year anniversary of the tradition. The first book of etiquette was published in 1922.



In more recent years, the challenge for my generation stewarding this tradition has really been to navigate the transition into the digital world. More and more we are finding that www.EmilyPost.com is the central location where people find Emily Post and find the information that we have to offer – both the traditional information and the new information.

It's been fun and, as is often the case, it's a challenge and an opportunity for finding that the presence of business, navigating that content transition from print media to the online space, really parallels the way many of our social lives are transitioning into that online space, as well. In many ways it is an appropriate place to continue this tradition.

Fitts: Right, and there are many, many resources and before we close, we will go through them. You and your cousin, Lizzy, do a podcast, correct?

Senning: We do. We host 'The Awesome Etiquette' podcast, which happens every week. It's a classic Q&A format show where we answer four or five listener-submitted questions each week and discuss in slightly more detail a topic of etiquette in a section we call the postscript. We finish the show with something we call the Etiquette Solute, which is our reminder that civility and etiquette are not dead; they are alive and well, and there are many good examples of people being kind and decent to each other – both in little ways and in big ways. It's our chance to highlight one of those and remind ourselves and our audience that there is plenty of good that is happening out there and to salute it.



Fitts: Sometimes when I'm feeling 'punk', you have these little graphics with beautiful quotes. I'll tweet them out only to make me feel good. My favorite is one you often use, "Etiquette is the science of living," or something on the importance of kindness.

There are a lot of inspirations if people want to plug in, and I recommend it.

You also have courses for business and kids. There is a large amount of kids' materials, which we will discuss. Are all the courses online, or do you do them in person as well?

Senning: The place where we do the most training and teaching is in person, although recently we've been transitioning more and more of our teaching material online. So, we do have online courses.

Just this last month, we finally released a dining etiquette course, which is something that we've been working and working on. We finally got something that we really felt was good enough to represent the tradition and represent the basic ideas that we wanted to present well.

It's a continuing process, but we definitely have online business training – both for individuals and for groups. Our newest offering is a dining etiquette course that I'm quite happy with.



Fitts: I travel a great deal around the world and throughout America by car, and I see endless opportunities for your family business going forward.

Let's dive into the role and importance of manners, back to the very beginning of the Emily Post tradition. Talk a bit about the role and importance of manners.

Senning: It's a concept that is as old as people getting together and sharing food. We are social creatures. We live in a web of social connections that we depend on that is the way we all survive. Ultimately, what we expect of each other socially and what we expect of ourselves in social situations is the heart of etiquette. It's really about navigating those expectations with ease and in a way that makes everyone comfortable. That is the most essential description that I can give.

Of course, there are layers and layers of subtlety that you can start to apply to that understanding. But at its core, it is about the quality of the interactions that we have with each other.

There is a slide I share in most presentations that I give. It's a quote from Emily Post where she says something to the effect of, "Etiquette is not some rigid code of manners. It's not a set of rules. It's simply how people's lives touch one another."



I call that the ‘good news’ slide because I think many people have a conception about etiquette that it’s a particular code of conduct that was established at a particular moment in time, and I see it as a living, breathing thing. I see it as something that really is about the way that we connect with each other and the quality of those interactions and that is good news.

I like hearing it in Emily’s words because it reminds me that has been the core concept behind etiquette since my great-great grandmother first started writing about it and thinking about it almost 100 years ago.

C. Austin Fitts: One of the quotes I wanted to use in our commentary when we publish this is from her: “Nothing is less important than which fork you use. Etiquette is the science of living. It embraces everything. It is ethics. It is honor.”

I do believe that there is a very valuable place for ritual in our lives. I’ll never forget my first day at college and picking up the wrong fork at lunch, and everybody looking at me. There is a place for knowing which fork to use and the rituals of these different things, which I think is invaluable.

Senning: I love that idea of ‘ritual’. It communicates well the importance of these expectations that we have of each other and the way they actually convey meaning that oftentimes our social expectations are in place for really practical reasons or significant reasons.



We have this formula that we use at the Institute. We talk about etiquette being a combination of manners and principles. It's a rudimentary idea that etiquette equals manners plus principles. I tell people, "Write me the calculus equation."

I really think that etiquette is manners derived from principles, and principles are timeless and eternal. They are values and concepts that we can take with us through time and from one venue to another.

Consideration, respect, and honesty are for us the core principles behind good etiquette. You might express those core principles differently in different situations. In an era before cell phones, you didn't think about the disrespect that you could show by taking out a cell phone and answering it in the middle of a conversation. In one culture you might greet someone in a different way than you greet them in another culture. The manners – the particular ways we show those core values or principles – really do change, but they are part of the equation.

Those abstract principles are made explicit and recognizable in our behavior by the way we employ particular manners. When you talk about the importance of the way you share food, this is a fundamentally important ritual. One thing that we've noticed is that while some manners change very rapidly as you change locations or move through time-like our manners around communication-and every time there is a new communication technology or revolution, manners change.



If you were to look at the manners I think are the most consistent – the ones that look the most similar in the 1922 edition of etiquette and the 19th edition of etiquette – I think that they are the manners around the table. Within a particular cuisine or within a particular type of dining or a particular dining tradition, table manners change very slowly. It's not like you're going to figure out a better way to eat with the fork than the billions of people who have eaten with a fork billions of meals before you.

When you look at the basics for how you hold a knife and fork in the 1922 edition, it's essentially the same as the 19th edition today.

Fitts: I'm glad that you said this because The Solari Report subscribers are very serious 'foodies'. We have a big food series as part of our podcast. You are in Vermont, which is a state full of very serious 'foodies'.

Senning: We are growing in that capacity, no question.

Fitts: One of the greatest challenges for our group is: How do we maintain our manners in a society which seems to be increasingly uncivil? How do you navigate an uncivil society, maintain your manners, and maintain and feel inspired on the importance of good manners when you're watching the manners around you slip away or debase?



Senning: This is an eternal question. I think that every generation witnesses the changes that occur in manners over a lifetime and think it's possible the state of manners is in decline. I also think that it's probably true it can feel dire when you're in that situation, but I think manners are like a pendulum that swings. I think that old manners use their utility and fall out of fashion, and new manners emerge. I think you can take heart that each generation will do some assessment of what is still functional and what is still useful, but will ultimately adopt a code of conduct that makes sense. This is a process of renewal that continues.

I told you that my great-great grandmother got questions about grandchildren who didn't write thank you notes. My grandmother got questions about grandchildren who didn't write thank you notes, and I get questions about grandchildren who don't write thank you notes. I'm hoping that someday, if I steward this transition well, my daughter will get questions about grandchildren who don't write thank you notes.

Fitts: First you're going to have to teach her about the importance of writing thank you notes.

Senning: This is every generation's burden and challenge, and also honor and privilege. I think it really is up to all of us to take responsibility for the people we have the most responsibility for, and that is ourselves. Very rarely do we have the standing to correct anyone else's etiquette or behavior. You can have the most impact when you can recommit yourself to treating people with consideration, respect, kindness, and honesty.



Some people think that manners or etiquette are something that you know. I like to tell people that it's a practice; it's something that you do. It's something that you continually recommit to in your life.

You show appreciation and gratitude, and that's not only in your professional life after a big opportunity for a promotion – although that is important – but it's also to your family and the people who you see every day. It's important to the person who you only see once on the street who does something nice to you or smiles in a way that picks you up. Ultimately, it really is a practice. No one is perfect; we are all going to be responsible for committing the unintentional rudeness or the inconsiderate act that you apologize for when you make those mistakes, and you move on instead of dwell on the discomfort or guilt.

I think that it's important to approach it like that, and I receive questions from people confronted with rudeness. This is a question that we get often at the Emily Post Institute. They say, "I've been confronted with this rudeness," or, "I'm experiencing this bad behavior. What do I do? How do I respond?"

So often, the really good answer is that you hold yourself accountable and take the high road. Ultimately, it's the place where you want to be. Everyone is familiar with the idea that two wrongs don't make a right. Well, two rudes don't make a right either.

It can be a more minor infraction, and you still want to hold yourself accountable. Rise above it. These aren't excuses to throw up our hands or to get too judgmental towards other people. It's up to all of us to be responsible for our own orientation as well as behavior.



Fitts: I have to tell you a story. I had a wonderful ally who ran the confederate museum in Washington. The Smithsonian asked him to give a speech on southern traditions and southern culture. A youngster, someone your age, jumped up in the middle of the speech and said, “Why should I listen to this? How is this relevant to me?”

John Edward leaned back and said, “Young man, culture is the integration of the divine in everyday life.”

So, the question, whenever I’m faced with someone who is really being unreasonable, is: How does that divine intelligence come down to a practical application in that situation? How do you navigate this towards something more positive?

Senning: That is the real test, it really is. When everything is going smoothly, when everyone is at their best, it’s easy to be at your best. The real challenge that is up to all of us to embrace is: How do you maintain that positive mindset? How do you continue to find that grace? In the language of your friend, how do you find that sense of divinity in what you are doing?

It seems like really loft language. At the same time, we’re talking about our connection to each other, which is a fundamentally important thing.



Fitts: That’s the reason I find myself going back to your website. It’s like an oasis. I need to get refreshed and be around a group of people who are saying, “This is important. This is important. This is important.”

I went through a period of very high stress, and when nothing else would work, I would either walk out the back and visit my cousin’s cows, or I would listen to Bach’s Goldberg Variations. You’re a bit like a version of my cousin’s cows or the Goldberg Variations when it comes to civil society.

What inspired you to write the book about digital manners?

Senning: It was the area of etiquette that was the vanguard territory when I was first working at the Emily Post Institute about ten years ago, particularly social media. People had started to get a pretty good idea of how to navigate the world with a mobile device in their hands. A smartphone wasn’t quite as ubiquitous as it is today, but people were getting used to cell phone culture. The advent of social media – the broad adoption of people using social media outside of colleges and across all categories of American life – was really causing people to have many questions about how to navigate this new space.

We’ve talked a great deal about how etiquette is this part of our social fabric and part of the way that we connect to each other. It has much to do with social expectation, and this was the new territory where people were interacting, developing relationships, and it was affecting long--established relationships. Young people were on Facebook whose parents were now joining, and they were trying to figure out what that meant.



Just to take you back in time a little, some of the types of questions that were starting to emerge were: How do I handle professional relationships in these spaces? It felt new and a bit risky, but also safe. There were questions of how you manage your public and private life in these new spaces. These weren't really settled yet in people's minds.

It was actually inspired by the environment and the times.

Fitts: I also wanted to bring up the question of family wealth. I recently closed my individual investment advisory practice, but after many years of working with families and family businesses, one of the things that you notice is that understanding manners and kindness are so important.

Number one, people who marry kind people end up healthier and oftentimes wealthier than people who marry people who are uncivil. Also, it's the same with businesses. Businesses where the leadership knows how to lead people and interact with people – whether it's clients, customers, or whoever – makes an enormous difference over many, many decades. You see it when you look at things over a very long period. So, whether it's your health or your wealth, etiquette and navigating graciously and navigating with kindness is very, very important to success.

This, of course, takes us back to: How do you teach your children and grandchildren the habits that are going to produce success? Do you have any tips on how you communicate to the children who you love – whoever they are – the importance of this for their success?



Senning: I'll use my mother's language. She wrote a book that is for parents and teachers about teaching etiquette. She called the book *The Gift of Good Manners*. It was from an Emerson quote or someone like him. I don't want to misrepresent it, but he basically said that manners were the best gift that you could give any child because it really equips them for a lifetime.

Her whole approach to teaching manners was this was a gift that you were giving your children. She developed our teacher training program for parents and teachers. When she was teaching that program – which I co-taught with her for years – she started off by using language. She used to say, “Model the behavior that you want to see. It's the most important thing that you can do.” She abandoned that language ‘model the behavior’ because she thought that even that was too conditional. So, she started to say, “Be the parent that you want your kids to be.”

This isn't a mantle that you can put on and take off; the children are watching you all the time. They are learning by absorbing who you are and what you do all the time. That means holding yourself accountable and really being that parent or being that person who you want your children to be or the children that you are teaching to be.

I loved watching that evolution in the way that she talked about it. She became more and more committed to the idea that it was really about you and your behavior and your conduct. She could develop a set of teaching tools, and she did, for children at different stages of social development, but, ultimately, the most effective thing that you could do was to treat your children with consideration, respect, and honesty. That would teach them to be that kind of person.



I think that is a remarkable challenge to give people. It sounds so obvious when you say it, but at the same time, it is the practice of committing to that all the time.

Do you cheat on your taxes? Do you tell your spouse to tell that person who called that you're not home? That's a lie. You have to be very careful with your own conduct all the time.

Something else that is music to my ears as I hear you talking – and I say this only partially in jest – and we also have a business 'train the trainer' program, and you should take it. You could teach our business etiquette training. When you talk about the organizational benefits of good behavior and the cost of bad behavior, it really is fundamental to understanding how business cultures work and organizational cultures are maintained when you think about cultures and climates of civility and respect as foundation for good customer service and good employee relationships that allow people to work and be productive.

The studies are endless. They talk about the cost of bad behavior and losing personnel and the cost of lost work time from rude behavior.

From the academic research, there is a definition that I love to share with people. Rudeness is often defined as behavior that causes emotional harm or distress, but even so egregious that someone is likely to mention it to you. If you think about insidious that is, it's really dangerous.



Fitts: It's very dangerous. Here is one of the challenges and I see it with my subscribers all the time. It's one reason I try to stay in a state of amusement and to stay coherent. A lot of times in our society we are dealing with people or institutions that, on the face, have excellent manners, but on the substance-I do plenty of work with financial fraud- they are stealing your money.

If you are dealing with a fraudster who has great superficial manners – not real manners – there is a multiple personality that you are dealing with. So many subscribers are running into this multiple personality phenomena. There is style and there is substance, and they may be good on one or bad on both. Some fraudsters are absolute bullies.

People are getting tricked, and that is confusing them about the importance of good manners, and that good manners is more than style. It's really substance. If I'm being nice to you but I'm illegally emptying your pocket, that is not good manners.

Senning: Absolutely not. The third core principle for us is honesty. That is integrity and authenticity, both in how you represent yourself, as well as basic honesty in terms of how you conduct your business.

There is something from dining etiquette that – believe it or not – translates here. We often say to people, “Safety trumps etiquette.” If someone has been drinking, you don't let them drive home. If someone is choking, you knock the chair over and give them a slap on their back and give them the Heimlich maneuver.



Fitts: Right, you don't care if you break the china or not.

Senning: No. If something is so hot in your mouth that it's burning you, get it out of your mouth. We'll worry about spitting at the table later.

There is a 'safety trumps etiquette' concept. From diplomacy, it's 'trust but verify'. Deal with people as if they have integrity. Assume the best in others until they prove otherwise, but protect yourself. Take care on a fundamental level.

Fitts: Don't burn your tongue.

Senning: Exactly. When you get back into the question of etiquette, this is where you get into the subtlety around authenticity and how genuine you are. Oftentimes organizations represent themselves a certain way, but is it believable? Is it backed up by the quality of the work they do, the actual content of the work that they do, and is it believable? Is it a customer service line that has been generated, or is the person who is delivering it and welcomes you, when you walk through the door, authentic and believable? Are they happy with the work that they do? Do they feel supported by that business in a way that they can deliver that line so that it's true?

I think that is where you start to get into the interesting work of applying good etiquette. In a very practical sense, when you are talking about fraud, you are talking about people who are operating outside of the norms that you would usually expect people to operate in, and that is really difficult. There's no question about that.



Fitts: To navigate society today, you have to navigate dealing with people who don't have integrity.

There are two things that get really complicated for me. One is maintaining manners when you have to navigate a society when you're dealing with people who have anywhere from high integrity to no integrity. Number two, you are going back through multiple cultures, so the kind and gracious thing to do in one culture is offensive in another culture.

That's why I said that when I looked at your resume and realized, "Oh, he has a degree in molecular biology," I thought, "Oh, how perfect!" The complexity quickly becomes mind-boggling.

Senning: It's true. The other part of that story is that I then worked in the performing arts for almost a decade. I definitely had the time in the hard sciences, and then the time in the performing arts. I find both are really helpful when I'm talking about and advocating human behavior and human expectations.

There is a concept that has gotten really popular in training circles in the last few years, and sometimes it's presented as the 'Platinum Rule' or the evolution of the Golden Rule, that it's no longer enough to treat everybody the way that you would like to be treated. That's a good baseline concept, and it's something that I often hear when I do word association with the word 'etiquette' when I'm doing training. People will say, "Treat other people the way you would want to be treated."



I'm starting to hear this more, and often a hand is raised in the audience and they say, "You also have to treat other people the way that they would want to be treated."

This idea that you are able to navigate a world that is increasingly diverse and complex, and you are able to think about where other people are coming from, and what their expectations might be, and what would make them feel comfortable is an idea that is on the forefront of many people's minds.

It's not an entirely new idea. When Emily wrote her first book of etiquette in 1922, the particular social challenges that her world was responding to was industrialization and immigration on a huge scale. People were moving from rural communities to urban centers, and they were emigrating from other countries on a level that America hadn't really experienced before.

It was this real mix of cultures and expectations that was one of the reasons there was such a demand for information, and people thinking and talking and writing intelligently about how to navigate social expectations.

Fitts: If you look at the sales of the book, it was explosive, including right through the recession and the depression. It's quite remarkable.

Senning: One of my favorite editions was the post-World War II edition. It was the one where she made some of her most significant editorial changes. She was really reckoning with the emergence of the American middle class.



To get into a historiography here of Emily Post's etiquette, there was a conceit to the early editions that she was revealing a code of conduct that really functioned for, what was known as, 'best society' when she wrote the first edition – which was a term of hers, not mine.

By the 3rd edition that you received from your mother, she had introduced a character named Mrs. ThreeinOne who was hosting a dinner party without the help of a butler, a cook, and a server. So, she went from the world with characters named Mr. Toplofty and Lady Oldworld. By that post-World War II edition, Miss ThreeinOne was really the dominant character in the book. That evolution and that transition had really happened in a way that permeated the entire book.

I think that the chapter with behavior for how you navigated moving from one box to another at the opera had disappeared at that point.

Fitts: Actually, since I'm an opera fan, that is one that I continue to need.

Senning: I know, from a person who works in performing arts and really treasures that experience.

Fitts: I would like to refer back on how to use the resources of the Institute to follow up on this. I have to ask you: No matter how much I believe that manners are important and kindness is important and graciousness is important, all of which I do, but occasionally I will lose it – as the Solari Team can tell you.



When I lose it, I'm just like any old person. When you lose it, you're one of the heirs of the greatest etiquette tradition on the planet, and everybody knows it. That must be a terrible burden to carry. Do you ever lose it?

Senning: I do, although not that often. It's more that I make mistakes that I feel embarrassed about. I tell people in the emotional response world, "Know yourself." I'm more of a flighter than a fighter. I've never sent an angry email in my life and I don't usually explode at people.

Fitts: Oh, I'm impressed!

Senning: I face a different set of challenges. For me, it's the challenge of not withdrawing, of being responsive when I'm communicating with people, and that I don't fail to engage socially. So, I have a different set of social challenges.

Growing up in the Post tradition added depth. Emily Post etiquette is about bringing a sense of comfort and ease to social interactions, and I think that makes everyone feel better. Ultimately, you have to be able to do that when you err, when you make mistakes, when you slip up, as well as when things are going smoothly.

Fitts: Right, because everybody is going to slip up.

Senning: It's saying, "You're welcome, I'm sorry, pardon me, excuse me." Those are all magic words.



Fitts: I really want to make sure that everybody understands how to find the website and how to find the resources that you have. You have books, courses, and podcasts. You have many things.

March us through how to access the website and the different resources that they can use. This year for a birthday or Christmas, if we were going to give something to the young people in our family that we love to help, what would we do? What would we give them?

Senning: You can go to www.EmilyPost.com, which is our main website. It's a great jumping-off point. You can find information about all our different programs. There is a bookstore there that has links to all our books. We have that *Gift of Good Manners* book that I mentioned that is really for parents and teachers, but we also have children's books for kids at all stages of social development. That's pre-reader, toddler, and pre-teen. For teenagers, I really think that treating them like adults is really where they are, in terms of their social development. So oftentimes, the big book of *The Book of Etiquette* is a great graduation present for someone for high school or college, as they start to head out on their own and think about how they are going to navigate life.

I would also mention with regards to keeping in touch with the Emily Post Institute, we are on social media. We have a Facebook account, a Twitter account, and an Instagram account, and all those are linked on our website.



We have a blog with a daily etiquette called Etiquette Daily where we post a daily calendar etiquette reminder. We also cycle through questions and answers that are frequently asked at the Institute. It's another way to get a daily dose of etiquette that is a nice way to stay connected.

Fitts: When you do the podcast, do you list the questions that you answered in that one?

Senning: We do. You can find the Awesome Etiquette podcast on any podcast app – iTunes, Google Play, Stitcher, TuneIn, you name it – and in the description of every show we have a list of the questions that we are going to cover in that episode.

Fitts: I really want to put a plug in for getting the *Manners in a Digital World: Living Well Online* book because I think it's something that I see parents, grandparents, and children struggling with. Taking the spirit and the details of etiquette into that world, you describe taking it into a complete new world after World War II, but I think that the digital book takes it into a whole new world again. It's a leap forward, and it's a very big one.

Our 2nd Quarter Wrap Up's main theme is 'The Rise of the Asian Consumer' and it's about the rise of the Asian middle class. Much of the multiple personalities of culture that I'm dealing with are in this rise of the Asian middle class. So, it wouldn't surprise me if that was going to be one where you're going to have to take it to a whole new level. American cities are going to end up being real multicultural pods very similar to what your great-great grandmother was dealing with.



Do you have any other thoughts that you want to contribute before we close?

Senning: Only that it's been a pleasure. It's really nice to have a chance to have a long-form discussion about some of this. It really is nice to be able to get beyond the soundbite or the five-minute interview and really have a discussion. So, thank you for having me.

Fitts: That's what we do, but I also have to tell you that I think what you are doing and what the Institute is doing is exceptionally important. I think that if we are going to integrate technology but have a human future, it's very important that people have support and guidance on how to maintain humanity, how to be human, and how to revive and maintain our culture.

I think that the Institute is making an invaluable and an important contribution, so I thank you for the inspiration you have given me, and I thank you for all the training you've given my family – even though I resisted it until about the age of 30.

Senning: That's classic!

Fitts: So, your family has been an incredible gift to me and my family, and I just want to tell you how much I appreciate it. With that, let me thank you for joining us on the Solari Report and have a wonderful day.

Senning: It was my pleasure.



MODIFICATION

Transcripts are not always verbatim. Modifications are sometimes made to improve clarity, usefulness and readability, while staying true to the original intent.

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