They're Not Just for Children

We learned them as children and these essential words are effortless to say but convey a wealth of meaning to others. They're powerful for their ability to create positive interactions.

"Please"

Using "please" expresses both respect and consideration for those with whom we're interacting because it changes a command into a request. It sets the tone for whatever follows and is one of most important universal manners.

"Thank You" and "You're Welcome"

Most people know to express their thanks for gifts, favors, awards, and the like. But we sometimes fail to recognize and show appreciation for the everyday courtesies that come our way, such as when someone holds the door or lets us go ahead in line. Expressing thanks for these little services is a hallmark of civility.

When someone says, "Thank you," the best response is, "You're welcome." Don't be bashful--accept the credit for your kindness. It's subtle, but an "It was nothing" is actually saying that you place no value on what you did. By accepting thanks graciously you can also encourage the "thank-you" habit.

"Excuse Me"

"Excuse me," "Pardon me," and "I beg your pardon" all express your awareness that you've inconvenienced someone else. Make it a habit to excuse yourself whenever you do the following:

- *Make a necessary interruption:* "Excuse me, but you have a phone call."
- *Make a request:* "Excuse me, but this is the non-smoking section."
- *Acknowledge an error:* "Excuse me. I didn't realize that you were already waiting in line."
- *Acknowledge a faux pas, such as burping:* "Excuse me."
- *Leave a conversation:* "Excuse me, I wish I could chat longer, but I have to leave now."
- *Get up from the table:* "Please excuse me."

"I'm Sorry"

Making and accepting apologies gracefully are acts of courtesy and maturity, and they are important for matters both big and small. Sincere apologies can defuse volatile situations; it's hard for most people to remain angry with someone who takes responsibility for his own actions. "I'm sorry" is also one of the simplest and often kindest ways to express sympathy or regret. A job loss, an illness, a death in the family, or the loss of a pet are all times when you might say sorry. At these times, keep it simple--you don't need to elaborate.