

Coated in it. Impermeable; impervious; impregnable and immersed in self-serving selfishness. How does this happen in such a free and wonderful society?



Case in point: The Cartoon Channel/Turner Broadcasting and the City of Boston.

On January 31, Boston came to a near standstill; roads and bridges were closed; people's lives interrupted; business lost; schedules messed up all because a kids' TV show marketing effort had placed several suspicious looking packages in exactly the places terrorists might place plastique or dynamite. Concerned citizens called it in and the authorities, in keeping with what they should be doing in a post 9-11 America, took it seriously.

The cost of the readiness and reaction, other than the disruption to peoples' lives is over \$1 million dollars and the City of Boston and its Mayor are, rightfully, determined to make Turner pay.

Turner's response: An apology; worded as follows: We're sorry these objects were MISTAKEN (my caps) for ...etc etc." Not, "we're sorry for disrupting 3 million peoples' lives"; not, "we're sorry for scaring people", or "we're sorry for being so irresponsible".

No, in this Teflon-coated age, we can't expect a clear and clean apology. Why? My bet's on the legal department. "Heck, if we apologize for what we did that'll be the same as accepting responsibility for our actions and we'll be sued and we'll have to pay".

So, we get the re-creation of the apology. It is no longer an expression of regret for what WE did. Rather, it is an expression of mild understanding that YOU reacted to it in way you didn't like.

It happens to you and me every day. In restaurants, in retail stores, with hotel staffs; anywhere we are paying for services. If something upsets us; if we feel we're not getting the value we were promised; if our food's cold and we send it back with a complaint, we are most likely to hear "I'm sorry YOU feel that way". Not much of an apology and not much satisfaction.

Worse, as more and more of this occurs, we all seem less and less able to do anything about it. It's been a strange kind of evolution. Manners and courtesy; civility and responsibility were taught to us by our parents, our teachers and our religious leaders.

I am neither sociologist nor cultural anthropologist, but there is a difference today. Maybe it's because over the last two generations or so, the communications revolution has been so exponential that it has altered, forever, the folkways and mores of our society. Freedom of speech, as defined by the founding fathers, may have become more a case of freedom of pushing the envelope (just look at Wolf Blitzer's awful and embarrassing manhandling of Vice-President Cheney in relation to the grandchild – the veep's gay daughter's child). It was inappropriate and offensive but CNN wanted to do it, planned to do it and, when Mr. Cheney went after the veteran journalist on purely moral and human grounds, Blitzer bumbled and stumbled his way out of it looking uncomfortable and cowed.

This lack of civility is permeating every level but is, naturally, most palpable at the political level. Watching our Senators try to come up with a resolution against the surge but for the soldiers – against President Bush but for his chosen General Petraeus – is like watching kindergartners tussling over a cookie. Individual political expediency overtakes reason and even honor and we end up with a bunch of bleaters performing for the national and local cameras arrayed before them. Don't know about you, but I'd rather have 100 shoe salesmen come to Washington and run the Senate and send this gaggle of Senators out to the shoe stores to look at people's fallen arches and corns and learn a little about real life.

I guess I'm just remembering the times when you could find a voice in the wilderness and it

would help you re-establish your sanity. It seems what's happened now is that we're searching for a piece of solitude-giving wilderness amid the cacophony of all these loud voices.