



# THE ROYAL BANK OF CANADA

## MONTHLY LETTER

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### *Social Sense*

**M**EN and women are not isolated individuals. They are associated in many ways: in business, in schools and in societies; they are banded together in families, churches and nations. Until we accept this fact and give it proper weight and thought, neither the problems of society nor our problems of personal mental health can be effectively stated and solved.

Social sense is the lubricant that helps us rub shoulders with other people without friction. It is useful in every phase of living, from the contacts of everyday affairs to the highest service to humanity. It prompts you to move well into the elevator or the street car to leave room for more people; it inspires those who work for great social causes. It can be big or little in the things it does, but it is the human virtue that makes civilization and culture possible. Without social sense mankind would be a race of barbarians, lacking both institutions for public service and the business enterprises that make our high standard of living possible.

Our hope of advancing civilization lies in developing an infinite individual variety within a society so ordered as to give it fullest scope. As John Stuart Mill put it in his great essay *On Liberty*: "... of pursuing our own good in our own way so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain it."

Civilization is a fragile construction, painfully hard to build and to preserve, tragically easy to destroy. We acted like apes for quite a stretch — millions of years, scholars tell us — and the business of acting like gentlemen is a comparatively new idea. Social sense is one of the protective devices to keep us from breaking through the thin veneer.

Society is not only a protective device but a positive good. In it a man can be fully himself. No one can realize his ambitions except through business, literature, art, the professions and other means of self-expression — every one of which requires an audience or colleagues.

### *Stability and change*

The primary ends of society are social order and public prosperity. These require a certain stability. If conditions were constantly changing, life would be impossible. We must be able to count on what to expect in the home, in the office, and in all other of our contacts with people, if we are to live happily, work successfully, and enjoy life.

But this is not to deny the necessity of change. To stall would be just as fatal as to race our engines or change gears every minute. A wholesome society must be a happy combination of conservation and change, of stable order and intelligent readjustment.

Advancement demands change, but it must be informed advancement. Nonconformists in matters of principles and science and business are the world's great innovators, leaders of world opinion, but nonconformists in the decencies and customs of everyday life are the world's most waspish irritations.

Our problems of social living are complicated by the expansion of human knowledge and its creations. Our social competence must catch up with our scientific achievements. The intelligence needed for building a world in which atomic fission and human beings may exist together has become indispensable.

We are likely to think that it is not worth doing the little we can do toward saving our western way of life, but all that is done, the greatest that is done, will be made up of the acts of individual people. Whoever can clarify our thinking in a small way and in a small circle, whoever can remove a resentment, soften a prejudice, strengthen a good work: that person is contributing to the total solution.

### *Prejudice*

One of the greatest encumbrances in business, professional and social life is prejudice. The simple truth is that for success in business and for personal

peace of mind we need to co-operate in working out a way of life with people who are just as sure they are right as we are ourselves.

This is more widely accepted in business than in many other sectors of life. Few business men seeking to sell goods ask about the prospect's religion, race or political beliefs. They are concerned with what the man represents in the business field.

Outside of business a man has room for opinions, convictions and ideas, but not for intolerance except against things and acts that are anti-social. In attempting to eradicate these things, intolerance is beneficial. Robert Burns, the poet who could pity an uprooted daisy and feel the panic thumping through the heart of a field-mouse, whose tolerance embraced the world like the warmth of a summer day, fought what he believed to be social ills with taunts and venom.

Tolerance means we should not expect too much of other people. No one has a right to call himself civilized who cannot listen to both sides of an argument and get the other fellow's point of view. This is good business as well as good social sense. By looking at the proposal from the buyer's viewpoint, the salesman perceives the things that need to be cleared away so as to let the customer see the good points about the sales proposition.

Social sense calls for a self-forgetful approach to those with whom we live and work and fraternize. The negative person should read David Dunn's practical book *Try Giving Yourself Away* (Updegraff Press).

To indulge in anger is not only unsocial, but it is against one's own interests. Someone has ventured the opinion that all provocations to anger may be brought under one of two rubrics: fear or mortification. It is difficult to disprove this, and just thinking of it makes it simple to set up safeguards against flying into tantrums.

A person who is angry does not see life in the same way as when he is cheerful. Dignity, common sense, justice, are shrivelled up in a blast of temper and destroyed, and the angry person looks somewhat ridiculous.

Logic tells us the futility of anger. Is it not absurd to be angry with a man because he does not understand the force of your reasons, or gives weak ones of his own, or is rude? A Stoic philosopher, Epictetus, said in that stately way of his something that is good for every executive's guidance even today: If they are wise men, why make war with them; if they are fools, why heed them?

### *Does ignorance excuse?*

Between foolishness and ignorance there is a wide gulf, and the nice questions arise: how far should we

indulge ignorance; how far does ignorance excuse unsocial conduct? Finding reasonable answers to these questions is a challenge — and a headache — to every business executive.

There are two kinds of ignorance. A man may be ignorant of what is right and what is wrong, and this may be cured by instruction; or he may be possessed by the ignorance that thinks wrong does not matter. We ought to try to understand people to the extent of knowing which sort of ignorance they have, so that we shall know how to cure it, or how far to trust them, or whether we should avoid them.

One need not be ashamed of one's ignorance if it honestly come by . . . the result of cramped opportunity to learn, of schooling cut short by economic forces or by illness, or of something lying totally outside one's control. The great fault in ignorance lies in not trying to cure it when opportunity can be made.

### *Social education*

In appraising social sense we cannot measure people by their pretensions, by what someone called "the shadowy grandeur of artificial poses." It is not by partaking gracefully in the motions of formal dinner parties, or reading books because they are "best sellers", or talking socially to people we do not care about concerning things that do not interest us: it is not by these manifestations that we demonstrate our social sense. Social sense pertains to the realities of life.

Whatever force great national or world leaders had in the way of technical knowledge, academic learning and the power of making courageous decisions, every one had, pre-eminently, the personal magnetism that won people. Their social sense was the keystone of their success arch.

Where are we of today to start reconstructing our world on a firm base of social sense? Most of us will agree that humanity's greatest hope is in education, moral and academic, of both children and adults, but particularly education of children. We must so arrange things that young people are given the best possible opportunity to reach social maturity.

Children must be taught certain fundamentals, like respect for others' rights and for others as individuals, honesty in their own thoughts and in dealing with associates, and living under the law. They learn these things in school, in the family, in church, in associations like the Boy Scouts and the Girl Guides. The lessons will not be confined to hidebound texts, but will use living principles — things in which we of the western world have believed and in which we trust — as the firm base upon which to erect a self-reliant, self-possessed and self-controlled society.

It is not enough to abolish by legislation some external phase of temptation to anti-social behaviour. Grown people, as well as children, may be nursed into inefficiency by relying upon law to keep their social course straight.

What we need is the imbibing of principles that will give us a standard by which to judge any event, a starting place for any adventure, a base to return to when the going gets hard. The person who establishes his life on such principles can be the most daring person, because from there on up his intelligence has fullest play, not tied down by fearsome backward glances nor trammelled by ghostly memories of taboos half remembered.

### *Rights and duties*

One thing necessary to know is that every right brings with it an obligation of a double sort: when one man has a right other men are under an obligation to respect it, and, in a more subtle sense, when a man has a right he is thereby laid under a social obligation to employ it for the general good.

Absolute freedom is not possible, and we only frustrate ourselves if we yearn earnestly for it. It can never be allowed, in business or in the professions or in any other aspect of life, that members of society should do as they please. We have the right to speak freely, to worship freely, to choose our work freely, to select our political leaders freely: but these rights carry with them the obligation to speak, to worship, to choose and to select wisely.

To assure society of general adherence to the necessary rules of duty, we have governing principles like the British North America Act, the Criminal Code of Canada, and the rules of fair play in sports — things that are our social way of saying that might does not make right, that minorities and erring people and individuals are, in our way of life, important.

Because human behaviour is so complex, no book of rules can hope to regulate all of it in detail. Our laws attempt to lay down broad maxims and to govern certain special types of behaviour that experience has shown are likely to do particularly hurtful damage.

When one of these laws is taken out of the statute book on to the floor of a court, social sense and clear intelligence and upright reasoning need to be applied by the authorities. In a good society, a court of law would not be an arena wherein lawyers battle for conviction or acquittal, but a forum in which counsel co-operate with the bench to see that justice is done.

### *A sense of values*

Every civilized man desires the richest and fullest life obtainable. To attain it he needs to learn to think and to feel and to discriminate, to develop himself as

fully as his environment allows, to express himself in ways that contribute to his social satisfaction, to permit his intellect to play freely around every significant event and idea, and to allow his emotions to respond fittingly to all stimuli.

Clive Bell, writing in his book *Civilization* (Pelican), put it this way: "Sweet reasonableness and appropriate seriousness were the qualities that distinguish Greek life, thought and art: the one is Reason, sweetened by a Sense of Values; the other a Sense of Values, hardened and pointed by Reason."

This could be taken as an all-inclusive prescription for attainment of social sense. From these primary qualities may spring a host of secondaries, like tolerance, intellectual honesty, good manners, a dislike of vulgarity, freedom from superstition and prudery, a taste for truth and beauty, detestation of brutality, desire for a liberal education, and a fearless acceptance of the good things of life.

Only by grasping such a handful of civilized qualities as we can, and holding them tight, may we hope to become members of a good society.

### *Understanding people*

One of the bases of social sense in business or private life is an understanding of people. There are few gifts that one person can give to another as rich as understanding, and there are few necessities so vital.

We cannot imagine two departmental managers working successfully at arm's length on a project, particularly if they are highly creative people whose self-expression through their work means more to them than bread-and-butter. They need to know each other's nature, desires and interests, so as to win and give a sympathetic response to overtures and suggestions.

It can be vastly perplexing if, when we are engaged on work that requires co-operation and joint action, we come up against a personality we have not studied.

In a special issue of the *American Journal of Sociology* a few years ago, devoted to a study of "Misunderstandings in Human Relations", attention was drawn to the tendency of introverted (contemplative) and extroverted (activistic) personalities to misinterpret each other because they are unable to understand that they see different meanings and objectives in life.

Examples will readily occur to business men from their own experience of how two men, locked in responsibility for some plan or job, flared up and parted and perhaps ruined the job, just because of this unfortunate misunderstanding. One man thought the other a busy-body; the other thought his harness-mate was a dreamer.

Social sense in a situation like this does not consist in ignoring differences, but in getting to understand them. Study may be needed, reading a book or two, perhaps talking with a psychologist or a psychiatrist, but certainly a frank talking it out with the men concerned.

### *Customs and manners*

Many smaller upsets occur in the working day, due to people rubbing each other the wrong way. To avoid piling up an unbearable load of static, we have developed a code of customs to which everyone is supposed to conform. Let us not demolish well-established customs without careful thought. When we do dismantle a custom and look underneath, we may find a reality, a necessity, the custom had marked or masked.

Only uncultivated people find good manners formidable. Courtesy is kindness expressed in action, and etiquette is merely a collection of forms that help to make courtesy easy and natural.

Courtesy is the best single quality to lift one above the crowd. It can be summed up in a sentence: be considerate of others in little things. Its essence is thoughtfulness. It spreads, under this general principle, into every hour of the day and every social act: using a friendly voice, saying "thank you" to colleagues, messengers, elevator operators, people who hold doors open for us, people who serve us at counters, people who step aside to let us pass, and, indeed, upon the slightest excuse given us to show appreciation of even a required act.

Courtesy is refraining from doing things that irritate others. Courtesy will prevent our launching into a tiresome monologue when someone makes a casual remark about health, weather, or any other of the social small-talk topics. Courtesy will prompt us to arrive on time when we have arranged to meet someone or to pay a call. Courtesy will see that we do not pick out special cronies at social gatherings, excluding all others. Courtesy, no less than the law, will prevent the motorist from blocking the sidewalk at an intersection, sounding his horn to voice his exasperation in a traffic jam, splashing mud on pedestrians. Courtesy will impel pedestrians to walk on the right of the sidewalk and to protect other pedestrians against the danger of an umbrella, open or closed. Courtesy will prevent people from breaking into a queue, pushing ahead of others already waiting to board street cars and elevators, blocking doorways and sidewalks, scattering rubbish on the street and in parks.

Courtesy will lead us to treat every person with such consideration that his memory of us will be pleasant. No matter how exalted we may be in the hierarchy of industry or business, we may blend that greatness with gentleness, magnanimity, and absence of arrogance.

Courtesy is most effective when by custom and long habit it has become subconscious.

As Joseph Addison, distinguished scholar and essayist of the 17th — 18th century, said it: "good breeding shows itself most where to an ordinary eye it appears the least." Courtesy includes something of the ancient code of chivalry, which allowed a fair field, and equal partition of sun and wind, and whatever else appertains to a fair combat. Courtesy includes respectfulness when it is due.

### *Business courtesy*

All courtesy is not sentimental. The man with a sense of values will not fail to appreciate the sheer intrinsic superiority of courteous over ill-bred behaviour. Of course, many courtesies that belong to the social world would be out of place in a business office or in a factory. But it is still wrong — anywhere — to indulge in haughtiness, or temper, or spiteful talk, or sneering ways, or provoking actions.

In the business world, codes of courtesy are expressed through graceful self-respect, good-natured impersonal composure, tact, patience, and recognition of the rights and privileges of others.

It is well to treat formal people formally, avoiding familiarity with people you do not know well. Good advice, good for the executive as well as for the juniors to whom it is addressed, is given in *Poise for the Successful Business Girl* and *Keys to Etiquette for the Business Girl*, both published by The Dartnell Corporation, Chicago. These hints are of universal interest in business, because the rules of business manners should be known to all parties.

### *Today's special problems*

It has become clear that human actions, and not super-human or sub-human influences, are the great barriers to human progress in the social sense that is of greatest importance to the race. Upon the development of social sense depends not alone the fullness of happiness we enjoy but our very existence.

Our problems resolve themselves into these parts: they are largely social in origin, in that they can be traced to groups: they are social in their results; and the responsibility for their solution is social.

We have more problems than our forefathers had because we have more interests, more functions and more agencies. The principle holds good in the social field as well as in mechanics that the greater the number of parts in a machine the greater is the probability of something going out of adjustment.

Our society may not be so much in need of the redemption some people urge as of a grown-up recognition that new social problems must be accepted and dealt with as part of our increased maturity.