PIPELINE
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The Porcupine Predicament Applied to Control Rooms, Part Two

In part one of the Porcupine Predicament last month, we examined the need for a proper amount of individual space in control rooms, using this part of the parable:

One cold winter's day, a number of porcupines huddled together quite closely in order through their mutual warmth to prevent themselves from being frozen. But they soon felt the effect of their quills on one another, which made them again move apart. Now when the need for warmth once more brought them together, the drawback of the quills was repeated so that they were tossed between two evils, until they had discovered the proper distance from which they could best tolerate one another.

This month's article is about how we can endure being in close proximity to one another. The parable continues and describes how we are driven together:

Thus, the need for society, which springs from the emptiness and monotony of men's lives, drives them together; but their many unpleasant and repulsive qualities and insufferable drawbacks once more drive them apart. The mean distance which they finally discover, and which enables them to endure being together, is politeness and good manners.

In the 1970s, when smoking was still allowed in control rooms, one of my fellow operators smoked about two packs of cigarettes each shift. He never emptied ashtrays and there would be ashes strewn all over the desk. I considered his actions insufferable, but I still had to show up and use the shared space. Another operator, whose dentures did not fit properly, took them out at work and put them in one of the common coffee cups. That was repulsive! And none of us demonstrated much politeness or good manners.

What do politeness and good manners look like in your control room or shared work space? I have observed that today's pipeliners are kinder and gentler than in the 1960s when I began. There are different expectations for acceptable behaviors today. But what is acceptable varies from place to place. This is somewhat dependent on company norms, the examples set by management, and what individuals will tolerate from others. A good way to apply this article is to list a few thoughts about politeness and good manners in control rooms. You can generate your own thoughts.

- Always remember that you are sharing the space with others. Therefore, have the courtesy to leave the console and other shared areas clean and orderly before you finish the shift and during the shift.
- You do not have to share personal opinions about controversial subjects at work. In fact, it is not even necessary to have an opinion at all.
- Do unto others as you would have them do unto you, even to those who are not currently present in the control room.
- Regularly evaluate your qualities, seeking to reduce repulsive behaviors and insufferable actions.
- Recognize that each of us can make a significant contribution to helping others live a meaningful life if we will follow the advice of Marcus Aurelius: *People exist for the sake of one another. Teach them then or bear with them.*