

## Cruel to be kind

A few days ago, I stood in line at a clothing store to pay for my purchase. I placed my purchase on the counter and expected the cashier to ask, “Cash or credit.” Instead, she asked, “May I have your email address and phone number?” immediately, I responded by saying, “You may not.” She looked at me with that puzzled look as if she was saying, “What’s up with that smart ... (blank. blank)?” she didn’t push her luck. Instead, she took my cash and put my purchase and receipt in the bag and wished me a “have a nice day” farewell greeting.

Some time later, I went to an office supply store to purchase some supplies. I placed my would-be purchases on the counter and the young African-American woman asked, “Do you have a rewards card with us?” I replied in the negative. Then she asked, “May I have your phone number?” Obviously, I was not going to give her my phone number. Instead, I created a fictitious phone number in my head and spouted it out to her. She smiled at her accomplishment and keyed my fictitious phone number into her computer. No doubt, the company’s research will be able to discover the buying trends of people based on real and fictitious phone numbers.

As she handed me the receipt, she said, “You have an accent?” Not to be outdone, and using my Irish trait of answering one question by asking another, I said, “Doesn’t everyone have an accent?” Taken aback a little, she said, “But yours is different?” Defaulting to a false sense of surprise, I replied, “Isn’t yours different, too?” She came back with, “But you’re not from around here?” To which, I replied, “You mean to say that people around here have an accent like yours?” “Yes, I suppose you could say so,” she volunteered. She was not quite finished yet and continued, “So, you are not from around here?” Emphatically, I said, “I live here;” So ended the conversation. I picked up my purchase and left.

I was amazed that in a short span on the same day, I encountered cashiers looking for personal information that had nothing to do with any of my purchases

I often encounter the same mentality on web sites that I visit from time to time. Some bait you with a carrot in exchange for your personal data which often includes your name, address, phone number,(optional in some case) and of course, your email address. The carrot might be the opportunity to download a program to try or that is, in some rare cases, free. But in order to be able to download it, you need to give up some personal information. My modus operandi in such cases is to give fictitious name, address, and email address. In that case, I will not be inundated with spam – not the kind you might eat but the kind that might clog the arteries of your inbox.

In an age of transparency and reality shows, it is amazing how many people are willing to divulge intimate details and personal information. Maybe, it is a plea for acceptance, notoriety and even some financial rewards. Social networking sites invite participants to share revealing information under the guise of friendship but eventually could harm or destroy.

It is amazing that, as a society, we are the most connected and in touch with each other both locally and globally but, at the same time, we are lonely, unfulfilled and even depressed. I often wonder why many of the advertisements shown during the evening news shows peddle remedies for headaches, sleeplessness, ulcers, and depression. Is it because the daily news is so depressing and we need some help to forget or is it a reminder that because we are lonely, sad, unfulfilled and even depressed that the news stories reflect our common malady?

Having a sense of humor, no matter how unusual it may be at times, may be a lifesaver and a breath of fresh air. And yes, I do have a real name, a real address and a real email address as well as an accent which helps me keep in touch with that part of me that is cruel in order to show some kindness.