

TWO MAGIC WORDS

An Oration

by
Hon. James A. Farley



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Not long ago in my mail I received a request from a college student in Pennsylvania, a young man who said he was writing a thesis on Government. He knew of my background in politics, and asked me to fill out a questionnaire.

There were at least forty questions, and some of them called for detailed and complex answers. I was quite busy but, believing that any interest in Government should be encouraged, I sat down with my secretary and dictated a long reply. It took most of one afternoon, but I finally sent it off with the little glow of satisfaction that comes from completing an arduous and voluntary task.

I looked forward to receiving from this young man some acknowledgment as to whether or not I had helped him. But I have yet to hear from him to this day.

I told myself that it was a matter of no great consequence and to put it out of my mind, forget it. But obviously, since I am writing about it now, I didn't forget it. I didn't forget it because I was disappointed.

The truth is, ingratitude hurts everyone. It also hurts the person who fails to show appreciation because he may make an enemy where he could have kept a friend.

Simply feeling gratitude isn't enough; it has to be demonstrated, one way or another. Perhaps the boy in Pennsylvania was appreciative but if so, his appreciation is wasted because he never told me. Two words—thank you—could have made all the difference.

Furthermore, the incident made me examine myself. When someone's performance hurts or displeases you, it is a good idea to ask yourself whether traces of those unpleasant characteristics may not exist in you. So I asked myself, how much do most of us appreciate the countless little daily acts of courtesy or kindness on the part of other people that make our lives smoother and more comfortable? How grateful are we, really, for the privilege of living in a country where it is possible for most of us to take freedom and justice and security for granted? How much thankfulness do most of us feel for the marvelous gift of life itself, and how adequately do we express this to the Giver?

The honest answer to each of these questions was painfully clear. Not enough. Not nearly enough.

And so I have decided to make a New Year's resolution to try to change my attitude from a passive to a more active one where gratitude is concerned.

To thank the people who make my world run smoothly—waitresses, elevator operators, taxi drivers, barbers, anyone—not just with a casual word or an impersonal tip, but with some expression of genuine interest in them as fellow human beings.

To make myself more aware of the miraculous privileges involved in simply being an American, and to show my thankfulness by working without thought of reward to make the best country in the world even better.

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