Being nice online

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THE way some people communicate online is not always the same as when they talk to others in person.

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There are those who think the medium – its informal nature, its immediacy plus the possibility of hiding behind a fake name – gives them license to go to the extreme when passing information or commenting on the posts of others.

They forget they went to Catholic schools or that their parents and grandparents taught them to be nice to people. Their online persona becomes a second personality without regard for propriety.

They pass on unverified information for the heck of it and to see who they could fool; they can be vulgar in their comments because their parents or teachers, anyway, would not see their posts. They copy from other blogs and websites and claim the reports to be their own.

This bad behavior is what is discouraging the acceptance of websites, blogs and social media like Facebook and Twitter as the new arenas for information dissemination, discussion, and community expression.

It becomes the obligation then of those who operate in the online sphere, either as bloggers, website owners, digital journalists, or technology entrepreneurs, to introduce guidelines on proper behavior on the Internet.

A group of Cebu bloggers or those who write website logs (blogs) started the ball rolling with a manifesto committing themselves to responsible online behavior. The Cebu Blogging Community issued the manifesto over the weekend with a promise to be "accountable for whatever we click-publish as we promote open Internet expression."

Blogger Ruben Licera Jr. said the manifesto was in answer to the call for people to be accountable for what they post because a blog is also a "public journal." Licera runs his own blogs, represents the community in forums and holds the recognition of Blogger of the Year and Social Media Advocate of the Year in 2014 given him by Globe Telecom.

"We strive to observe truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity, impartiality, fairness and public accountability as fundamentals to good writing. These apply to the acquisition of worthy information and its subsequent dissemination to the public," the manifesto said.

It also promised to "be respectful always to our readers as we tackle social issues and promote social good, to highlight positive feedback and manage criticism." The manifesto cited the "limitation of harm" principle that, it said, means withholding certain information not materially important to the report or may harm reputations. Examples are the names of children and crime victims.

"We also vow to uphold sensitivity and inclusiveness in writing about race, religion, sexual orientation, and physical or mental disabilities," it added.

Licera said the group plans to hold training sessions for its members to upgrade skills and learn standards of citizen media participation.

One challenge to the blogging community is to teach other Internet users the right decorum.

In addition to what they are doing for themselves, the group can reach out to the online public to let them know of the commitment to responsible behavior in the hope of encouraging others to adopt the standards. Cebu bloggers can be their teachers on how to be nice online.

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