

Say 'hi' to your cleaning auntie



MAGDALENE NG

FOR those of us who work in offices, seeing office cleaners go about their daily tasks is a common sight.

However, many of us don't see the need to talk to them.

Why is this so? Is it because we see them as people who do "dirty work" - lowly paid blue-collar workers who don't deserve a second look?

Some of us even feel superior - after all, cleaning is a **menial** job, compared to the 1,001 mind-boggling and challenging tasks that we do.

But the truth is that without these cleaners, we would not be able to enjoy clean toilets,

dust-free work stations and cleared waste baskets.

A few months back, a cleaner told me that she had been re-trenched and would leave within days.

I felt for her and tried to console her but, somehow, could not find the words to express what I felt.

However, judging from her gesticulations and a smattering of words - we don't share a common language - I gathered that she knew what I was trying to say.

Yes, we don't speak the same language but I would call her "auntie". Whenever I saw her in the **pantry**, I would make **small talk** with her.

Later that day, I related my encounter with the cleaner to a colleague. She looked stunned, as if I should not even have chatted with "auntie".

I was taken aback by her reaction.

I have often seen many cleaners step aside when staff

are about to use the pantry sink or walk through a door.

Some even hold the door open for us.

So, are we responsible for their feeling like second-class members of society? Is that why they feel so self-conscious?

Thankfully, I have another colleague who treats office cleaners as equals.

She seems to know all of them although she has been with the company for only two years.

A walk through the corridor sees her exchanging greetings with several of them. They would then go on to talk about other things.

While I may not be as chatty, I exchange pleasantries with cleaners I run into.

It makes their day when we acknowledge their presence and hard work. A simple "thank you" goes a long way and brings a smile to their faces.

Start with a **nod** or a smile.

Then, initiate a simple conversation about, say, the weather. Soon, the conversation will flow.

It is through such simple chats that you start to connect with others.

So, put aside your prejudices and get to know your office cleaner.

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HELPDESK 我的字典

■ **Menial:** 卑下的 bēi xià de

■ **Pantry:** 餐室 cān shì

■ **Small talk:** 闲聊 xián liáo

■ **Nod:** 点头 diǎn tóu