



In large cities we're letting doors slam into the faces of the people behind us, we're just focussed on number one, not even observing anybody else in need of just a little assistance.

PETER RYAN, TODAY'S GENTLEMAN FOUNDER.

# Time to brush up on the old manners, chaps

**MODERN MAN:** A RELIANCE ON HORSES AND CARTS, PARASOLS, GLOVES AND POCKET WATCHES WERE VICTORIAN NORMS, WHICH HAVE FALLEN BY THE WAYSIDE IN THE MODERN WORLD. GOOD MANNERS, ETIQUETTE AND CHIVALRY, IT SEEMS, ARE NOTIONS ALSO CONSIGNED TO HISTORY, BUT ONE BRISBANE MAN IS ON A MISSION TO PROVE OTHERWISE

FORGET the African savannah. If you want to see survival of the fittest in action, take a look at modern Brisbane during the afternoon peak hour.

It's every man, or woman, for themselves. On the streets of the city heart, they jostle for a seat – or even a place to stand – and it starts from the moment the elevator doors part.

The second they do, the pace picks up with an army of power suits marching with purpose towards the nearest bus or train station.

Anxiety and clock-watching sets in as the little red man on the traffic lights flashes, dashing the hopes of the masses and delaying their arrival at the go card station.

When the publicly-funded chariot arrives, a weary sea of humanity boards, squeezing into every available nook.

It's a similar story on the roads, as car horns find a purpose and visions of a safe, but hasty, arrival home takes precedence over the similar wishes of brethren motorists.

For human resources executive Peter Ryan, the daily commute is an example of how common courtesy has taken a back seat in the fast-paced 21st century.

Rather than just observe the decline of civility and chivalry with frustration, he has launched Today's Gentleman, a group of similar-minded people keen to address what the 40-year-old saw as bad social behaviour, particularly from men.

"I don't know if it's just me getting older but I just think in a lot of ways basic good manners and consideration for others around them is on a steady decline," he says.

"I used to catch public transport a fair bit and I used to sit there a lot and I think people thought I was a bit strange getting out of my seat for the elderly or a pregnant lady.

"When I caught the train home and it was late at night, I used to wait in the carpark when ladies were waiting to be picked up.

"It's bizarre, but in a small country town they care for everyone around them, whereas in large cities we're letting doors slam into the faces of the people behind us, we're focused on number one, not even observing anybody else in need of just a little assistance."

His little campaign germinated in October last year when he launched a page on professional networking site LinkedIn.

Before too long interest had snowballed and a Facebook group had generated enough interest for February 22's declaration as Be a Gentleman Day.

More than 400 people have indicated they will mark the occasion.

"The day is simply an awareness day, saying, today, let's just be a little bit more conscious of those around us. Let's open the door, let's take a milli-second to consider someone else," Ryan says.

"I think it's just time to raise some awareness and introduce it into conversation ... I thought, I could sit here, whinging and



## Return to chivalry

WHY not mark the inaugural International Be a Gentleman (BaG) Day in your diary for February 22.

A day designed for all to reacquire themselves with – and demonstrate – their courtesy, good manners and better qualities.

Indeed, you could show them 365 days a year?

Visit [todays-gentleman.com](http://todays-gentleman.com)

whinging about it or I could actually do something small about it.

"I thought it was going to be just a couple of dozen friends and contacts that would come on board and say, 'yeah, I'll join your group' but it's much, much more than that now.

"From there it's become over 300 people in 25 countries and then I launched the day on Facebook and that's become 380 people – and that's in just three weeks."

The champion of chivalry is quick to recognise times have indeed changed, blurring the lines between what is expected and accepted.

A gender-neutral notion, which should be practised by all, he admits being chivalrous is not as easy as in times gone by.

"It's harder nowadays, absolutely, because of the pace of life but also because the social norms have shifted. If we think about feminism, if we think about equality, these are all very, very important things that needed to happen in society," he says.

"But what I'm getting at, and a lot of the feedback I'm getting is that a lot of men out there are too scared or they use it as an excuse.

"It applies to anybody. Some people say they don't want to do it because they don't want to offend, so nothing gets done, and I don't see that that's good for anybody."

So, keen to spread the word and recognise incidental consideration for others, Ryan has printed cards for distribution to those witnessed engaging in gentlemanly behaviour.

"The first card I did up – more of a laugh, as much as anything else – was a card to give to someone you've seen not display gentlemanly conduct, which said 'the person who gave you this card was disappointed with your less-than-gentlemanly conduct,'" he says.

"But in reality, nobody would use that because it could end in an argument or a fight or something and I thought what I want to encourage is good behaviour so this (good form card) is a good way to reinforce good behaviour.

He says the card usually gets a welcome reaction and has proved a particular hit with women, who ask for some to use themselves.

While in yesteryear, being a gentleman meant a gent dressing in a suit for a visit to town, placing their coat over a puddle for a lady and walking on the road side of the footpath, more contemporary gestures are being developed for the 21st century.

"Today's Gentleman group is about reassessing what is being a gentleman in today's society," he says.

"In some ways we've become quite lazy and even quite rude in the way we communicate, and things like not having your mobile up, or talking quite so loudly, fundamentally I don't think there's much point in making a huge list; it's all about having more consideration for others."

Manners, etiquette and civility are Lainey Loneragan's stock and trade and the senior lecturer of etiquette at June Dally-Watkins says she's thrilled with Ryan's initiative.

"I applaud him. Isn't it an absolutely fabulous thing to do? I love it," Loneragan says.

"All is not lost though, darling. I actually think the young people now are magnificent. As a whole they're not too bad."

Indeed, she says the high regard once held for respectful social behaviour is making a comeback.

"A few years ago we were called in by companies to do courses for companies in the city," she says. "Now we do lots of school visits, usually to Grade 11 and 12."

"I really do think there is hope."



**CHAMPION OF CHIVALRY:** Peter Ryan has started a campaign to reintroduce manners and etiquette among men; and (above left) the Today's Gentleman card.