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# Boss, why lah do you touch my roti canai with your bare hand in this time of Covid?



By [David Christy](#) - May 23, 2021 @ 12:01am

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Roti canai goes well with dhal. Not with a virus lah.-NSTP/File pic

All this talk about following the SOP reminds me of a classroom. And about managing people.

The teacher and manager, despite effort unceasing, can't get everyone to do what they want. There will always be that wayward soul. So it was in the Garden of Eden.

Alas! This is the rule, not the exception.

The Brothers Grimm may have illustrated this soul well enough with one of the shortest stories I've ever read. It's called "The Wilful Child". Look it up. At one-paragraph long and bereft of gobbledygook, it will surely not take too much of your time. Heh heh.

I unluckily encountered this stubborn child a couple of times in the past week

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week.

The first was at a checkout counter in a hypermarket. My purchases were lying on the dull metal surface. Moments earlier, I had taken great care to keep more than a metre away from the person in front of me.

So you can imagine my fright when I realised a fellow was standing within spitting distance of me. If he were a girl, I would say he was about to hug me.

I glared at him. If he got the message, he scarcely showed it. He was a swarthy fellow in Bermudas, and his substantial calves looked like they had been generously and mysteriously slathered with a layer of dust.

But I didn't stay long enough to get into a verbal duel with him. My anxious companion tugged at me and we were off in a jiffy. And in a huff.

This chap probably does not know the peril of proximity unchecked. Or he does not worry. Or does not care that an expert no less than Datuk Dr Awang Bulgiba Awang Mahmud says "there is a real danger of a catastrophe happening".

The Science, Technology and Innovation Ministry's Covid-19 Epidemiological Analysis and Strategies Task Force chairman warns that "we are possibly detecting less than half of the cases in the community".

I think I should convey this ominous message to the owners of a couple of restaurants, who are also 'wilful children'.

They are nice guys. But they daily roll the danger dice. What are they doing? It's actually what they are not doing.

Three days ago, I walked into a shop to get roti canai. The "boss" (we call everyone this) glided to a griddle. He removed a food cover, used a bare hand to take out an already cooked roti canai and tossed it onto the iron plate.

After about a minute, he grabbed the heated bread (with the bare hand again) and put it in a wrapping paper. He took cash from another customer in the same hand, turned to me with a grin and said: "Boss, your food is ready."

But this was not the main reason why I was squirming and sulking. For that, the blame lay squarely on the face mask that covered only his mouth. Barely. (That's how I perceived his grin.)



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His large nose was exposed and his voice was booming. God knows how many millions of nasty 'little things' were released from the orifices.

I told myself I would not set foot in that place anytime soon. Perhaps in 100 years!

On the way out I took a good look at the registration book for patrons. It bore the unmistakable and unhappy hallmarks of idiocy.

The writing was in the main illegible. Many times it looked like hieroglyphs. Sometimes like anagrams. And in several instances like geometric patterns. But it happens everywhere, right?

I wondered then what the enforcement fellows would make of it. Would they issue compounds if the writing cannot be read? What is the percentage of close contacts identified from registration books anyway?

Hmm, those and many more are tough questions to manage, I think. As tough as the stubborn children in our midst. How in heaven's name then will we ever be rid of this pandemic?

The writer is NST production editor

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of the New Straits Times

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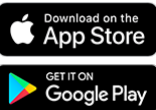
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