

## Nice: Virtue or Vice?

SCIENCE SHOWS  
THAT THE BLANDEST OF  
FOUR-LETTER WORDS  
PACKS A LOT OF MUSCLE

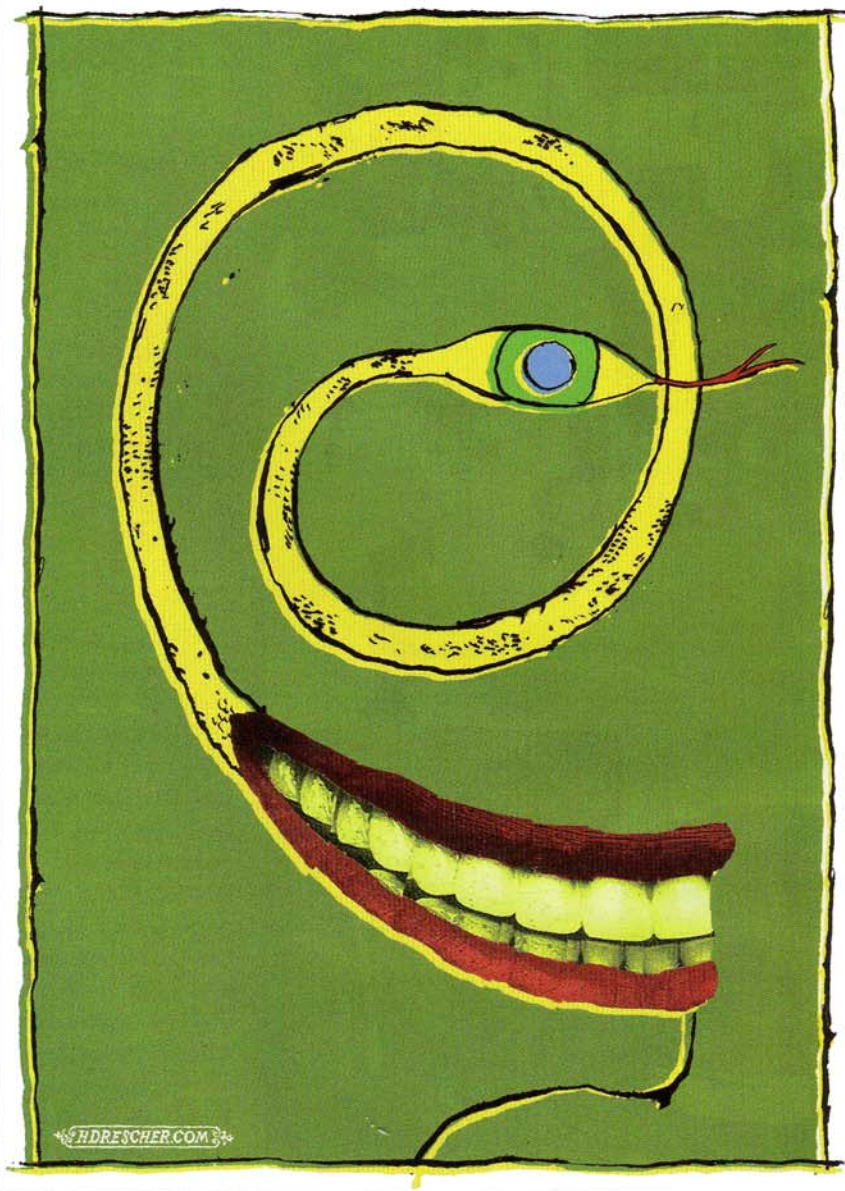
BY JENNA MCCARTHY

**M**OST PEOPLE ARE RAISED on a steady diet of nice: Be nice to your sister. Play nice with little Linda.

What a nice sweater. So nice to meet you.

But somewhere along the line nice took a nosedive, becoming the single syllable used to dismiss anyone or anything remotely uninteresting, unattractive, or otherwise underwhelming. Ask anyone with an ounce of diplomacy: "I had a nice time" actually means "I've had more fun at a funeral." The party was nice? Glad I didn't miss anything. Tell your wife she looks "nice" after three hours of primping, and get ready to have your jaw rewired.

Cast part of the blame on nice's etymological mother, *nescius*, the Latin word for "ignorant." Cast another chunk on a few permeating TV messages that the more immoral you are, the more likely you are to land the assignment/date/killer apartment with million-dollar views and impossibly attractive neighbors. In the odd sitcom instance where the nice guy actually gets the girl (think Niles and Daphne, Chandler and Monica), the result is so



treacherously tepid that, rather than cheering for their happiness, viewers are left praying for the couple's immediate and acrimonious breakup.

Despite the fact that making nice often lacks sufficient drama for the prurient onlooker, there is a practical upside to the behavior. According to research, agreeable people have stronger relationships, more lucrative careers, and more candles on their last birthday cake than their cheerless peers. Here's how to play nice—and win.

**ZIP YOUR LIPS** The unfortunate truth that gossip has a nasty habit of boomeranging back to smack you in the noggin is just the beginning. Turns out that when you bad-mouth Bitsy to Bob, Bob winds up associating whatever negative qualities you assigned Bitsy with you.

Researchers at Ohio State University at Newark who discovered this psychological paradox call it Spontaneous Trait Transference, and the ramifications are mind-numbing. Consider all the cash politi-