

Everything is an opportunity

• DR. BATYA L. LUDMAN

A recent newspaper story left me feeling saddened by the lack of empathy and respect that some people have for others.

A fashion chain released a shirt for sale with a statement written on it in big bold letters that was so offensive that it was ultimately removed from their stores and website. One can't help but wonder how many people were involved from inception to production who failed to see how inappropriate the slogan on the shirt was. We all know that this is not the first time that something like this has happened.

Feeling good at the expense of another reflects poor judgment and speaks volumes about those involved. Where is our moral compass and our embarrassment and shame at such a demeaning endeavor? What are the limits of acceptable behavior and do we actually need others to police our actions and tell us when something is simply unacceptable before we respond?

A useful measure of the appropriateness of an action is to reverse roles and see how you feel about it. Both the recent #MeToo movement and the fight back against corruption have had to be initiated because individuals with real or perceived power have opted to hide behind their status or deny the impact of their actions in order to justify their behavior. They clearly view their actions as separate from how they define themselves as individuals. Boundaries, either nonexistent or ignored, have been blurred or crossed and we as a society feel helpless, despondent and depressed when questioning the values of some of our seemingly most important citizens. One can't help but wonder who or what will be next.

With this in mind, in the same way that we have been taught as good scouts to leave a campsite cleaner when we depart than it was when we found it, is it not our responsibility as individuals also to leave our world a better place? In doing so, should not our short-term goal be to work on oneself daily to become a better person, make life more meaningful, and contribute more to society? While it may seem too grandiose an idea to attempt to change the world, through refining our behavior, even one baby step at a time, we really can make a difference. We have witnessed this happen on many occasions in the past (think how the country came together when three teenage boys were kidnapped) and learning this lesson can be incredibly empowering.

Though our resolutions are all but forgotten as January has come and gone, it is important to seriously revisit our goals for 2018, and in doing so, to take time to work on ourselves. In challenging ourselves to take responsibility and not be mere spectators in the game of life, I have some suggestions:

1. Recognize that how you see a situation determines in part how you will respond to it. Focus on being aware of yourself and your surroundings. Notice with appreciation all that your senses provide. What do you see, smell, hear, feel and taste? How can you perceive each experience as a positive one and enhance it to make it even greater? You will notice the positive effect this will have on your mood and productivity.

2. Ask yourself how you can infuse your life with more meaning and decide what you can do to make that happen. A life with meaning is more fulfilling and leads to greater levels of satisfaction.

3. Notice your behavior. Determine if you are proud of how you see yourself. If you are not, decide what you would like to change. What do you see as the first step in this process? Being a better person is both good for oneself as an individual and for society as a whole.

4. Ask yourself if you always take responsibility for your actions and behavior, and if not, why not, and see what you can do differently.

5. Notice in what ways you are respectful and consider how you could improve. Do you treat others with kindness, caring and compassion?

6. Reflect upon what and how you speak to, and about, others. Do you talk about them positively, and in their presence? Look at the impact you have on others. Assess how they perceive you and ask yourself if this is okay.

7. Ask yourself what you can do personally to help move others from being passive spectators to active participants in making the world a better and more moral and accountable place. Think of how you can prepare to take this on, even in a very small way.

8. Look at the messages you pass on to your children about acceptable behavior. Are you honest and sincere about them?

9. Sometimes we become immobile when feeling overwhelmed. Look at ways to keep your stress level down and keep focused on only what is important. Make the time to be with people who you respect and care about.

Every situation in life provides us with an opportunity for growth. We can see things positively, or we can see only the negative or we can see nothing at all. How we take this opportunity and make it into something special determines in part who we are and who we become. Each minute of every day, even the extremely challenging ones, has the potential to enable us to become a better person. The choice is up to us both how we see each situation and what we choose to make out of it. When one takes this seriously, it has the power to be truly transformative. ■

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