



SCHOOL
MOBBING
and
Emotional Abuse

See it—Stop it—Prevent It
with **Dignity and Respect**

GAIL PURSELL ELLIOTT

**Also available as a printed book
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School Mobbing and Emotional Abuse

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It With Dignity and
Respect**

Gail Pursell Elliott
“The Dignity and Respect Lady”

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Dedication and Thanks

*This book is dedicated to my children
Derek Taylor Elliott and Blake Mackenzie
Elliott*

*My Nephews and Nieces: Jeffrey, Frank,
Kristin, & Amanda Pursell*

*My Godchildren: Debra Csellar Ott and
Edward Csellar*

*My Family and Friends who encourage
and believe in me.*

*Special note of thanks to my father, who
challenged me after the shootings at
Columbine High School by saying, "Gail,
mobbing happens in schools. What are you
going to do about it?" Thanks, Dad.*

*In Memory of My Mentors: Millicent
Rinehart and Jack McManus*

*This book also is dedicated to all of our
children who are the workers of tomorrow
and who can build a new perspective
based upon Dignity and Respect. No
Exceptions.*

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Foreword

I met Gail Pursell Elliott when she contacted me for permission to use material from my book, *Swallowed by a Snake* in the book she was coauthoring that dealt with the issue of mobbing in the workplace. I was immediately struck by her dedication to her work, as well as her drive to educate the world on the issue of mobbing as a particularly insidious form of bullying—it is group bullying, meant to intimidate, harass, and mentally harm its victims. As I became more familiar with this term, I began to recognize that many of the clients in my psychotherapy practice had been victimized by this type of abuse. One of the crucial elements that sparked this discovery came about when Gail sent me a set of mobbing awareness posters for schools that she created in the spring of 2000, in response to the tragedy that happened at Columbine High School. Gail knew that I had been interviewed by CBS news after Columbine, as I am an expert in grief therapy.

When I initially showed these posters to my then middle school-aged son, he said they were “awesome.” I placed a set of these posters in the waiting room of my psychotherapy office. The posters describe the basics of mobbing, a lethal group activity that is meant to bully and hurt I was not prepared for the response the posters received. I was amazed. Both my clients and those friends or family waiting for them had immediate questions: What’s this mobbing thing? Is that when you are ganged up on by a group of people? Can it happen at work? Is three people considered mobbing? The questions kept coming and so did the stories. After the initial

questions people usually had a personal story about being mobbed. Most stories were about being victims but some would say, “Gosh, I’ve done that”—meaning, they recognized themselves as “mobbers.”

The people responding were all ages, some were men, some were women, some were boys and some girls. They all seemed interested and curious for more information. The posters struck a resounding chord.

I wondered how these posters could cause such a stir. I eventually realized that the posters put a name to a difficult but all too common experience. The term “mobbing” gave them a template to organize their experiences around. Without a name it is very difficult to define or describe something. Without a name an experience can sit unnoticed just below consciousness. When a name is brought forward the memories gel and the story unfolds...giving a name to an experience gives us a place to start from. With a process as complex as mobbing, a name is essential, and without it people often miss the experience or are at a loss in terms of how to describe it. With a name the stories jump into people’s minds. That seems to be what was happening to the people in my office.

This book gives you a name for mobbing. As you read these pages you will likely have an experience that is similar to the people in my waiting area; memories may pop into your mind about previous experiences. You will likely recall events when you have been mobbed or where you were part of the mobbing. The situations described in this book are that common.

This book goes much further than simply naming mobbing. It will also help you see beneath the mobbing. What are its causes? What keeps it going? How can we spot it? What can we do to help those who have been mobbed and how can we help avoid mobbing in the future? All of these questions will be answered in a concise and straightforward manner.

The author explains that the solution to the problem of mobbing lies within ourselves. Mobbing can be erased if we treat all people with dignity and respect no exceptions. If we make even the smallest exception then we could be seen as

encouraging mobbing. The smallest exception says, “They have acted badly and don’t deserve our respect.” It is just this attitude that fuels the sense of entitlement for a group to mob its victim. They don’t deserve respect. The question of who deserves respect is in danger of becoming a question of who is in power. The danger is that those who are politically correct will deserve dignity and respect and anyone deviating will not. This is a recipe for disaster and this book will show you how and why. All people deserve dignity and respect.

It is this point that perhaps may prove to be the “Golden Rule” of the 21st century. In the 20th century we lived by the golden rule of treating others as we would like to be treated. In the U.S. culture of the mid-20th century it was very common for friends of a grieving family to bring a casserole when they came to visit after a death. Families felt supported by this action. It was easy to gauge what might be seen as helpful and supportive since there was a good deal of homogeneity within the culture. In Taiwan the same action would not have the same impact. In Taiwan it is the opposite. The grieving family supplies the food for the guests and they find comfort in this. Bringing food to a grieving neighborhood Taiwanese family in the U.S. might well be insulting. Simply because we would find an action helpful does not mean that all people will find support in that same action.

When living within a highly diverse population we can no longer simply treat others as we would want ourselves treated. Our strategy must change to one that does not assume that we are the same as others; to one that acknowledges we are all quite different in a multitude of ways (and that those very differences are what make us unique, precious, and of value.) If we are to co-exist in a multicultural, multiracial environment we need to use this skill. To not do so invites mobbing. This book offers example after example of how and why this plays out and it presents us a difficult challenge: Can you treat every person in your life with dignity and respect? If not, then you may well be a part of the problem, however inadvertently. With the insight and awareness this book provides, we can all become part of the answer.

This book will help you see not only the mobbing but the connection between being mobbed and being hurt. In the early research on mobbing in Sweden researchers informed a group of “mobbers” the pain they had caused by their behavior. The group was shocked to hear that their behaviors had been hurtful! They were simply not aware of the consequences of their actions. Once this was pointed out to them they could avoid similar behaviors in the future.

The facts are simple: Mobbing hurts. Repeated mobbing hurts more. We are starting to see that the psychological trauma resulting from intense and repeated mobbing has the potential to result in the sort of violence we have seen at Columbine. When people are repeatedly mobbed it stretches them to their limits. One response to this stretching is to act out through extreme violence. Extreme hurt has the capacity to be transformed into extreme violence.

This book has yet another function. It exposes us to the new world of passive violence. Passive violence is a type of violence that has no overt aggression and can be hidden. We could call it “stealth violence” because the original source is so often unseen. We are accustomed to living in a world and a system of formal and informal laws that place limitations on physical violence. It is a fairly straightforward set of rules that say that you shouldn’t hurt others with physical aggression. We are so accustomed to these rules that we automatically know the “right and wrong” of violence when we see it. When we witness someone on the street hit someone else in a way that is physically hurtful we observe this and know it is wrong.

Mobbing is a form of passive violence; it can be even more insidious than overt violence since it is not as clearly defined or recognized. This book takes us the next step in evolution: Beginning to understand and to work in the world of passive violence. At this point our understanding is primitive and we are primitive in our capacity to grasp the extent of passive violence and its effects. As we evolve we will likely begin to have the same automatic reaction to passive violence that we now instinctively have for the physical violence. This book gives us a good start in that direction.

—Tom Golden, LCSW, author,
*Swallowed by a Snake: The Gift
of the Masculine Side of Healing*
Director, Golden Healing Publishing; LLC
Webhealing.com

Preface

Most people have a good idea of what bullying is. It is an overt activity that generally involves physical contact or directly abusive language. Many of us have been the victim of a bully at some point in our lives. One purpose of this book is to make you aware of a more covert form of bullying that takes place in groups, and is referred to as “mobbing.”

Mobbing is emotional abuse that involves ridicule, shunning, isolation, intimidation, and humiliation. Nobel Laureate Konrad Lorenz originated the term mobbing in the 1960s, to describe this behavior in animals. One example is geese forming a group to terrorize and drive away a predator, such as a fox. The book, *Mobbing: Group Violence Among Children*, published in Sweden in 1972, was based upon research involving bullying behavior among schoolchildren in Sweden by Dr. Peter-Paul Heinemann.

My book is not meant to be a scholarly treatise; instead it introduces the principles of Dignity and Respect as an approach to bullying or mobbing situations that on the surface may look confusing or complicated. This book is deliberately conversational in tone and style. The essays are intended to promote insight and awareness in students, teachers, counselors, parents, and school professionals.

It is my hope that the reader will appreciate the candor and common sense I bring to this topic. This book is intended to be a springboard or launch point for schools to be able to create programs addressing mobbing and bullying behavior that will be effective. Many approaches to this ongoing problem are

polarizing because they promote the concept of “good guys and bad guys.” This book is different because it promotes dignity and respect for all people, not just certain people.

All people agree that they want to be treated with dignity and respect. If people understood those terms and treated each other with dignity and respect, without exception, this book would not be necessary. Once people become aware of their impact on others they can make a conscious decision to change their behavior. I believe that rules, regulations, policies, and laws do not change attitudes and can, at times, even contribute to the problem. Instead of advocating for stricter laws, the approach I take in this book is to develop insight and awareness, so that changes in attitude can occur. Insight and awareness promote attitudes that support the safe environment we want in our schools.

Section one of the book serves as an introduction to what mobbing is. It includes checklists and pages that can be used to make posters or to be used in the classroom as instructional material. The posters on the back cover of the book are mobbing awareness posters that I developed for schools and can be ordered through my website, www.innovations-training.com.

Section one offers real examples of mobbing and dignity and respect approaches to addressing inappropriate conduct. The viewpoints of school professionals and parents are highlighted. This section also includes group discussion facilitation questions to promote dialogue as well as key points that are derived from the dignity and respect based communication classes that I offer to schools and workplaces through my company Innovations “*Training With A Can-Do Attitude.*”™ These key points are suggested for expansion and incorporation in appropriate school programs and can help with attitude adjustment.

Section two of the book is a collection of thoughtful and inspiring essays that support the purpose of promoting insight and awareness. Many of these have been used by teachers in classrooms as part of an opinion writing lesson plan or to promote discussion. Other teachers have had them available in

the classroom for independent reading and reflection. Teachers of math and science have found them to be just as helpful as language arts and social studies teachers have. The essays also have been reprinted in a number of school bulletins and newsletters.

In section three, I have included an excellent ERIC digest on the topic of zero tolerance, which is a controversial topic. There is also a listing of resources that I recommend that will complement this book with opportunities for additional reading, training that is available, and some websites that are positive and promote understanding.

Although this book introduces mobbing and how to see it stop it, and prevent it, the main purpose of the book is to promote the philosophy of dignity and respect for all, without exception. It is such a simple yet powerful and effective concept. For all its simplicity it is difficult, yet it is possible to achieve.

Each of us must learn to be more aware, to think and reflect before acting and interacting. We must attempt to separate the value of the person from the judgment of his or her behavior. It takes practice to behave in this way consistently, but it is well worth the effort. The positive impact of treating people with dignity and respect is not theoretical. It works.

Dignity and respect is not just something that we extend to others. It emanates from a sense of our own personal dignity and self-respect. None of us are perfect and neither is our world. It is my sincere hope, however, that this book will inspire greater insight and the awareness to emulate that ideal more often, not only in the school environment, but in the life of each person who comes in contact with that environment.

We really can change the world, one attitude and interaction at a time.

Part 1

Essays on Mobbing: Causes, Symptoms, Prevention Tactics

Ready for School

There was a story on the local news about getting ready for school. Part of it had to do with getting school supplies and preparing buildings and classrooms, but there was an additional story attached to the segment. It showed county law enforcement officers practicing shooting and learning how to safely enter a school building where there is violence before backup arrives.

So often we think of violence as being a sudden, intense, overt action. One of the definitions of violence also is injury, as to distortion of meaning or fact. It is this type of internal violence that can lead to the overt actions that we construe as violence. When we treat ourselves or others without dignity and respect as individuals, we are committing an act of violence. Treating a person as an object rather than as a precious, unique, one-of-a-kind event is a distortion of meaning or fact by definition an act of violence. It results in injury.

Treating each other and ourselves with dignity means that we define ourselves positively within and allow others to define themselves that way also. Respect means that we look past the first impression or stereotypical reaction to see and acknowledge that definition of dignity.

Most of us choose to believe that we are good human beings. If we believe this, then we must act like we believe it. When we allow situations to influence our actions toward others, we violate our own sense of personal dignity and

violate others' as well. How we treat others is a direct reflection of how we feel about ourselves at that moment.

Taking a few moments to become aware of this sense of identity sets the tone for our personal integrity. Most people think of integrity as being of sound moral character. There is another definition, however: the state of being whole and undiminished.

So here is another readiness exercise for school or work or simply daily living. To define ourselves positively we look beyond appearances to acknowledge that definition in ourselves and others and hold on to that vision, keeping it whole and undiminished. When we do this, we will be treating ourselves with dignity, respect and integrity. If we are true to ourselves, we cannot help but treat others in this way also. When we define ourselves, we define our world. And this may be where healing begins. It is Food for Thought.

An Introduction to School Mobbing and Emotional Abuse

Mobbing is group bullying. It is ganging up on someone using the tactics of rumor, innuendo, discrediting, isolating, intimidating, and above all, making it look as if the targeted person were the guilty part or instigated the behavior. As is typical of many abusive situations, the perpetrators maintain that the victim “deserved it.”

The term *mobbing* may be new to you, but I’m sure you quickly recognize the behavior. If you are familiar with Stephen King’s *Carrie*, Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*, or the movie *Dead Poet’s Society*, you have seen examples of mobbing and what it can do.

Though the subject of books, plays, and movies, mobbing behavior is not fictional. It is real. Mobbing has a devastating effect on everyone it touches and has a ripple effect upon other people, their families, their communities, and society at large. It contributes to isolation, physical or mental illness, depression, violent or self-destructive behavior, and mistrust. The targeted person may act inappropriately due to prolonged extreme stress.

Everyone saw bullies picking on kids in the schoolyard while we were growing up. This behavior has contributed to many acts of school violence, yet no one in the United States really paid much attention to it until recently. Though mobbing and bullying in schools have been going on for many years, children were not bringing weapons to school and mass-murdering each other. It is amazing that we have been in such denial that we have to be told the obvious out loud before

anyone would take action. In this case, someone had to die and a finger had to be directly pointed at this type of behavior before anyone would pay real attention to the issue.

The response to potential violence is often more reactive than proactive. Instead of creating awareness and promoting dignity and respect for all people, schools install security systems and surveillance cameras. Stiffer gun control laws are suggested. The plain truth is that many people are walking around with a deep anger inside of them and don't know why. I believe that one of the reasons is because so many have been treated like objects rather than as unique human beings for too long.

We don't have to wait until violence erupts to take action. The violence that is showcased in the media is extreme. What isn't reported is much more pervasive. Some children are afraid of riding the school bus. Some are afraid to say something because they fear retaliation. Some are excluded and humiliated. Just because a person isn't "beaten up" doesn't mean she isn't beaten up inside.

All you have to do is open the newspaper or turn on the evening news to know that we're on a collision course with something extremely unpleasant if we don't start changing the way we treat each other. Our children follow and expand upon the example we set for them.

Insight and awareness play a major role in change. So many people engage in this type of behavior without thinking. Prevention includes paying attention not only to what we're doing but also to what is going on around us. Most people don't intentionally abuse someone.

I invite you to join me in an effort to spread awareness and to help our young people. Treating others with dignity and respect or not doing so, impacts the future for all of us.

Mobbing Is

Ganging up on someone and...

Making cruel jokes

Spreading rumors

isolating and excluding

intimidating

Threatening

Treating a person like an object

Harassment and cruelty

Mobbing is Emotional Abuse

The Quiet Terror That Puts Everyone at Risk

Once upon a time there was a little boy in Austria named Konrad. Like most children, Konrad loved fairy tales and folktales. There was one in particular that he found fascinating. This favorite story was about geese that joined forces when they felt threatened by a fox entering the area where they lived. They ganged up on the predator and drove it away.

When Konrad Lorenz grew up, he studied behavior in animals. Remembering the fairy tale, he decided to study this behavior in the animal kingdom and found it to be a real phenomenon. He named the behavior “mobbing” and described it as the unusual ganging up by individuals to attack another species.

School mobbing was first researched in Sweden as a result of an investigation of suicides among schoolchildren. The researchers found that the severe bullying they termed “mobbing” caused such depression and isolation among these children that some of them simply could see no other way out. In the United Kingdom, more attention currently is being paid to this behavior and the resulting suicide rate. A heart-wrenching book titled *Bullycide: Death at Playtime* was published last year and tells documented, horrible tales of group abuse of children who took their own lives.

Not all who are targeted by mobbing commit suicide or acts of extreme violence. Many suffer in silence. They are confused, isolated, and depressed, and they grow up lacking the self-confidence to realize their full potential. Those who suffer and still excel in work or higher education carry with them the

memory of their experience. There is always injury, and the experience leaves permanent scars.

When I give presentations to groups of adults on this subject, I ask how many had this happen to them when they were in school. At least half of the audience invariably raises their hands.

When I ask how many of them can remember the names of the students who encouraged or perpetrated the abuse, everyone remembers. When I ask why they believe that this happened to them, not one of them really knows why. Some still wonder what they did that caused others to gang up on them and hurt them like that.

Mobbing is always caused by some sort of basic conflict, usually something impersonal that became extremely personal in terms of outcome. It can be anything. Someone says the wrong thing at the wrong time. Someone is new to the school. Someone looks, acts, or talks differently. Someone is very smart or the opposite. Someone brags about his or her family. Someone wears clothes that are different or not the current style.

Regardless of what the cause is, the mobbers use it as an excuse to engage in emotional abuse and to treat the target as a “sort of a person” rather than as a human being with wants, hopes, needs, dreams, and desires. Long after the initial conflict is forgotten, the mobbing continues. I think that if you asked those who participated why they did, they would be unable to give you a credible explanation.

The truth is that it doesn't matter what nameless phantom of misunderstanding triggers mobbing. No one deserves to be abused and treated like an object. No one. And it must stop, or everyone is at risk. Everyone.

The Mobbing Syndrome

In the medical community, when a number of factors join in combination to produce an end result, the term that is used is *syndrome*. Wherever the mobbing syndrome occurs, whether in the boardroom or the classroom, the factors are the same and the impact on the individual is just as damaging.

*Factors of Mobbing**

Mobbers attack a person's dignity, integrity, credibility, and competence.

Mobbers communicate in negative, humiliating, intimidating, abusive, malevolent, and controlling ways.

Mobbers act directly or indirectly, subtly, or obviously.

Mobbers instigate others who then act as a group or mob.

Mobbers attack in a continual, multiple, and systematic fashion, over some time.

Mobbers portray the targeted person as someone who "deserves it."

Mobbers discredit, confuse, intimidate, isolate, and force the person into submission.

Mobbers intend to force the person out.

Mobbers represent the removal as the target's choice.

Mobbers are not recognized, or are misinterpreted, ignored, tolerated, encouraged, or even instigated by the organization.

* Adapted from *Mobbing: Emotional Abuse in the American Work-place*, Noa Davenport, Ruth Distler Schwartz, and Gail Pursell Elliott, 1999 Civil Society Publishing, Ames, IA.

Why Do Others Join In?

They:

Want to be accepted

Fear becoming a target themselves

Don't see the target as a person

Don't understand the terror and misery they cause

Think they're doing the right thing

Think it doesn't matter

Don't know how to stop it

Don't think for themselves

Get caught up in the "power trip" of the situation

Become "hypnotized" by the leader or the situation to do things that they usually would not do

Chicken Pecking

Mobbing has often been likened to chicken pecking, a form of barnyard behavior. Chicken pecking is not one large chicken bullying a smaller chicken and beating on it. All the chickens target and isolate one chick and randomly go over and peck it once, maybe-twice. Not one of them abuses the chick enough to really do harm. But eventually the chicken dies because of the accumulation of all the pecks.

When chicken pecking occurs, the target never comes back and retaliates.

When the chicken dies, the other chickens don't look at each other in shock or surprise. They know exactly what they are doing.

When a student is being mobbed by other students, minor incidents of ridicule or shunning may occur. It is the accumulation of so many students engaging in the same behavior that causes the spirit and self-image of the target to be in danger of perishing.

When the research on workplace mobbing was done in Sweden in the 1980s and the researchers went back into the workplace and explained to coworkers what the consequences to the individual were as a result of their actions, the coworkers were shocked and appalled that they could have participated in anything that would have damaged another person to that extent. "But all I did was..." Just one or two pecks. But there

were many pecks from many directions over an extended period. And the target was the same person.

People can get caught up in mobbing, but most people don't intentionally abuse someone. That is why awareness is so important and why paying attention to what is happening, really happening, is the key to prevention.

The Targeted Person

- ⌘ **Feels Confused**
- ⌘ **Feels Anxious**
- ⌘ **Feels Physically Sick**
- ⌘ **Becomes Depressed**
- ⌘ **Doesn't Know Whom to Trust**
- ⌘ **Engages in Self-Isolation**
- **May Develop Feelings of Persecution or Paranoia**
- **May Act Inappropriately**
- **May Engage in Destructive Behavior Toward Themselves or others**
- **May Develop Acute Anxiety or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder**
- **May Suffer Permanent Physical or Emotional Damage**

To Be or Not to Be

Most people who participate in mobbing, whether students or adults, often do so inadvertently. They don't understand the pain that they cause, how deeply it affects the target or the long-range consequences.

Of course, there will always be some who are vicious and understand exactly what they are doing and get some sort of thrill or warped satisfaction from the suffering of another. These people need help also, for their sadistic tendencies, if left unrecognized and untreated, will affect them and others for a lifetime.

The following are some mobbing awareness questions that have brought shock and amazement to students. Most of them believe that they are good human beings and wouldn't intentionally abuse someone. Many, after seeing these questions, "wake up and smell the cocoa" and make a personal decision not to participate in this type of behavior again. Others have even stated that they would help stand up for those they see being targeted. Awareness plays a major role in prevention.

Mobbing Awareness Questions

Are you a mobber? DO you...

- ⌘ **Make fun of people behind their backs?**
- ⌘ **Spread unkind rumors?**

- ⌘ **Say things like, “If you talk to her, I won’t be your friend.”**
- ⌘ **Get others to pick on someone?**
- ⌘ **Get others to ignore someone?**
- ⌘ **Humiliate someone and act like it’s fun or a joke?**

DO you do these kinds of things to exclude someone from your group?

Zero Tolerance

Zero tolerance is a term and a position that has been employed by schools and businesses. The term and the concept were enacted as a requirement for states as part of the Gun-Free Schools Act in 1994 by Congress, and certain federal funding was made contingent on compliance. Originally I had put the words *zero tolerance* on mobbing-awareness posters and then decided to eliminate them. Here's why.

Although zero-tolerance policies are rules enacted by school districts for the purpose of addressing problems such as safety and discipline, they can sometimes be interpreted or used as an excuse by school officials for not taking responsibility for the environment in which inappropriate conduct occurs. This happens when behavior is addressed without exploring the circumstances of the situation and the root causes of the attitudes stimulating the behavior. For example, athletes may treat others in a bullying fashion because the coaching style is one of domination and winning at all costs without the balance of sportsmanlike conduct.

Some interpret this policy in ways to validate discrimination against certain students without investigating the true circumstances of individual occurrences. Students who over the years have been labeled by teachers "difficult" may not be afforded the same due process that other students may receive. When this happens, the system itself can find itself supporting the behavior that has spawned inappropriate conduct on the part of a student rather than using it as a mechanism to help students and heal behavioral situations.

When someone is targeted by mobbing behavior, he or she is forced into submission. The target is often mistreated, isolated, and excluded and may be afraid to ask for help or may be ignored. Sooner or later, some targets may act inappropriately due to prolonged and extreme stress. The inappropriate actions are not ignored. At that point the target of the mobbing or bullying becomes victimized by the very system which should be protecting him or her under the zero-tolerance policy.

Here's a very simple example. A first-grader is teased by others in the class. The teacher either does not see this or takes the view that kids need to learn to work out their difficulties. During one episode, the target in frustration sticks out her tongue at the person who is teasing her. The teacher immediately intervenes and punishes the student who stuck out her tongue, never addressing what the other student did to antagonize the behavior. The message is clear: The victim has no recourse, and the perpetrator is given a green light to continuing the behavior.

Zero-tolerance policies, when intercepting inappropriate conduct, may address specific incidents but not the root cause of the behavior. Here is another scenario.

A student is egged on by another student to write unkind remarks on the back of someone's shirt during class.

- The student encouraging this behavior in another is the "mobber."
- The student who is the "writer" is a "participant" in mobbing.

The student whose shirt is defaced goes home. The parents see what has been done and visit the school counselor with the shirt in hand.

The target is asked who wrote the remarks and identifies the writer.

- The target is not asked to describe the circumstances of the incident.

The writer's parent is called and is informed of what happened.

The writer's parent takes action. She asks that the shirt be sent home, addresses the incident has the writer formally apologize, and launders the shirt also offering to purchase a new one.

The writer, while not becoming a good friend of the target now treats this person with courtesy and does not engage in the behavior again.

Policy enforced. Incident closed.

Problem:

- Because this is treated as an isolated incident without further investigation or follow-up, the mobber is not identified by either student.
- The mobber will continue to use other students to isolate and humiliate the target in more subtle ways. Because the students are unaware, they become participants in the mobbing process.

The writer may not have identified the mobber because she has been told that she is accountable for her own actions and decisions, which is true. Another reason may be the unwritten law among students that being a snitch is the ultimate transgression guaranteed to open them up to sanction by other students. So neither student may voluntarily reveal this information unless she is asked directly or asked to describe the circumstances of the incident in detail.

Students often fear those who instigate this behavior because they appear to have tremendous power to influence their peers. Though some students may not like what is happening to the target, they may steer clear of the situation to protect themselves. They participate passively and are afraid to take a stand.

The following is an example of the results of the type of peer pressure promoting the isolation and exclusion of the target.

A student calls a classmate who is the target of mobbing for help with homework. The target willingly helps the other student and they have a nice conversation. At the end of the call, however, the classmate says to the target “Thank you so much. You’re a really nice person. But please don’t tell anyone that I called you.”

The target replies, “Please help me.”

The student responds, “I’m sorry. I just can’t.”

There is clearly more than one victim in this situation. The target is the obvious one. But those who see what is happening and don’t like the situation but feel powerless to do anything about it for fear of retribution are also negatively affected.

These policies address what the school district will not tolerate in terms of behavior and the subsequent consequences. They do not address the dynamics that allow this behavior to continue, nor do they address behavior on the part of school staff that is mobbing behavior.

Some teachers and school officials have destroyed lives and futures, not only of students but also of others who came in contact with the student. They have promoted paranoia, low self-esteem, an “us and them” mentality, a hatred of authority, a sense of isolation, and feelings of persecution.

Like most abusers, this category of mobbing or bullying perpetrators often believe they are doing the right thing or try to convince themselves or their victims that the victim “deserved” it. Public humiliation used as a method of discipline or control in schools is an old technique. Even though we’ve outlawed corporal punishment in the form of paddling, or public humiliation in the form of wearing a dunce cap or standing in the corner in full view of one’s peers, the behavior continues. It has simply gone under-ground.

“If people will be respectful to me, I’ll be respectful to them.” That is a direct quote from a ninth-grade student in an “at risk” program. This student had been expelled for a year for bringing a weapon to school. She had attended an alternative school and was in the process of reintegrating to the public system. Her attitude and behavior in the classroom were good, but instead of encouraging her success, the assistant

principal viewed her with suspicion and continually let her know he was “watching her like a hawk.” He did this in the hallway where others could overhear him.

Although the year at the alternative school was intended to help her change her attitude and focus, and being reintegrated into the public school system was supposed to be an opportunity to start over, this student was “branded” a troublemaker by the assistant principal. Inadvertently, he was working at undoing the progress that the student had made. Optionally, he could have privately let her know that he had to keep an eye on her because of her history, but that he was proud of her attempt to turn herself around and that he had confidence in her ability to continue.

The justification offered for this behavior is protecting the students who follow the rules and fit into what is considered “normal.” When this justification is used to defend emotionally abusive behavior or to single out one student for humiliation, the system is then participating in the destruction of a human being.

So often when I have presented workshops or classroom programs to students, they express the wish that the adults in their lives were there to get this information too. The student statement “If people will be respectful to me, I’ll be respectful to them” is not uncommon. There is an important message here. This statement indicates that the students are waiting to see how they are treated as an indicator of how they will act. They watch for adults to signal these expectations.

There are numerous examples of how zero-tolerance policies have been interpreted to the detriment of students and prompted lawsuits by parents and derision by the media. Support and advocacy groups composed of parents, who believe that this type of zero-tolerance enforcement has victimized their children, have sprung up in a number of states.

For more information on the problems associated with the interpretation of zero-tolerance policies, including some research findings, see the Appendix for an excellent ERIC digest article on this subject.

“We Don’t Do That Here”: Promoting Dignity and Respect

Teachers can establish clear lines of conduct in terms of dignity and respect without being heavy-handed about it. They then can model that behavior in front of students for the time that the students are in the classroom. Regardless of what may occur elsewhere on campus, “We don’t do that here.” This creates a safe zone in which expectations are clear. It is important that this is reinforced consistently rather than sporadically or in a piecemeal fashion.

Most teachers are “accidental mentors.” They are teaching more than the subject Mentoring is kind of like diversity. It’s a part of life, whether we recognize it or not. There are plenty of programs these days that promote formalized mentoring. It’s become a buzzword for positive youth programs, and the concept is great. But it’s also nothing new; it has just been given a name and a formal structure.

The word mentor originated as a proper name in *The Odyssey*. Mentor was the teacher and trusted counselor with whom Odysseus left his son when he went on his adventures. In reality, every teacher and school employee, every adult with whom a student interacts, winds up being thrust into the role of a mentor. People watch, learn, note the example. Whether we realize it or not much of the time our words and our actions really are being recorded by someone else. They are heard and viewed, remembered, recalled, and used as reference. For example:

“Look at how that nut is driving!”

“You should have seen how kind everyone was to someone who slipped on ice this morning.”

“My parents were talking about so and so this morning, and they said...”

We are continually being encountered, overheard, and observed by others. Setting an example, perhaps giving people ideas or arousing suspicion, planting all sorts of seeds. We can be either a good example or a good example of a bad example.

Teachers have a tremendous impact with their attitudes toward students. And each student will react differently to negative communication. One student may take it as a challenge while another will be crushed. Regardless of the reaction, all will take communication very personally.

The more classrooms that are safe zones when it comes to conduct the more the behavior has an opportunity to be practiced and extend itself to other situations. Most people, regardless of age, do not feel comfortable when engaging intentionally in behavior that is harmful to another person. Before change can happen, however, it is necessary that people see each other as human beings with wants, hopes, needs, dreams, and desires. When people lash out or treat each other in harmful ways, they often lose sight of this truth or they block it so that they can react to what that person represents to them. Creating a safe zone makes it safe for everyone.

Reacting in a heavy-handed manner unfortunately does little beyond addressing immediate behavior. What is necessary is insight and awareness. Then changes in both attitude and behavior can be the personal decisions that they are intended to be.

Although motivational speakers recommend releasing oneself from the past and taking each day as a new opportunity, often this is not promoted in schools or in the classroom. There the students' past behavior or performance can follow them around like a dark cloud.

When I taught at-risk students, one of the things that I attempted to do each day was not to “lead with my conclusions.” Each of these students had a checkered past in terms of school performance, trouble with the authorities, unstable home

environments, truancy, or other issues. When they entered the classroom, all of that was left at the door. They simply became my students, ready to begin a new day full of possibilities for them to accomplish great things. The classroom was a safe zone in which they were free to create a new reality for themselves if they chose to do so.

Years ago I walked into a classroom one day to substitute teach. There was pandemonium. One class was leaving and another arriving. One of the new arrivals began writing a variety of things on the board, which were not related to school or the class work. I quietly walked up to him, smiled, and introduced myself, and then said, "We don't do that here." He immediately became defensive, saying that he always wrote things on the board.

Rather than reacting, taking a hard line and ordering him to sit down, I quietly said once again, "But *WE* don't do that" He immediately stopped. I thanked him and he took his seat on his own. The class went smoothly Later I found out that this particular student was known for disruptive behavior, especially when there was a sub. I saw none of that. On other days when I subbed, he was always respectful and participated well in the lesson. Dignity and Respect are simple and effective and can have lasting results.

If You Think You See Mobbing

- ⌘ **Tell someone else in the organization what's happening. Ask for help.**
- ⌘ **Tell the perpetrators that you see what they are doing and it has to stop.**
- ⌘ **Take a strong position on the situation.**
- ⌘ **Protect the targeted person but DON'T isolate the person.**
- ⌘ **Encourage the target to take a stand.**
- ⌘ **Establish clear rules of conduct Be consistent with enforcement**
- ⌘ **Keep communication open.**

☞ **Use some type of counseling or mediation.**

☞ **Help the targeted person rebuild trust and self-esteem.**

“Will No One Help Me?” Parents in Turmoil

In the Disney movie *Beauty and the Beast*, there is a scene in which Belle’s father goes to the local tavern desperately begging for help to rescue her from the clutches of the Beast. The people ask him some questions, act as if they believe him, promise they will help him out, and then throw him out into the snow. Alone and in despair, he wanders around the frozen fountain in the town square. Reaching up to the darkness, he cries out into the echoing night “Will no one help me?”

Like Belle’s father, some parents are frustrated by the lack of response, investigation, assistance, or feedback from school officials when a mobbing or bullying situation exists. Often the school district is in denial about the possibility of this happening within their schools.

I have seen parents in pain and distress over their children’s situations and teachers feeling helpless to do anything to assist largely because of the lack of support from the school administration. Even when the administration takes a strong position and attempts to intervene, there is rarely the kind of follow-up that is needed.

Most school professionals are neither incompetent nor uncaring. The problem with mobbing is that by the time it has been reported, the situation has been going on for some time. Behavior patterns have been established. The target may be so beaten up and worn down, often suffering from feelings of paranoia and anxiety, that it is difficult to determine who is participating and playing which role in the drama. Frequently those who are the true mobbers, those who instigate the

behavior, never appear in the counselor's office at all. They have encouraged others to behave in an abusive fashion toward the target, making it appear that the target is responsible or deserves the mistreatment.

Mobbing is much subtler and more difficult to detect than out-and-out bullying. What we refer to as bullying behavior is clearly harassment and is often easier to recognize than mobbing. Contacting the school about a concern is generally a last resort on the part of a parent. Often students will suffer in silence or will have tried different methods of stopping or avoiding the behavior before a parent becomes aware. If a parent takes the time to come to school or to make that contact you can be assured that the situation is serious or the impact of the situation is.

Be as certain as you can that the remedy does not take the form of a Band-Aid on a gaping wound. Promising a parent that you will look into the situation simply isn't enough. Feedback is essential, and follow-up is necessary.

See No Evil, Speak No Evil Parents in Denial

Many schools—
some public, some private,
some military, some guarded.
He heaved bricks,
pulled knives in the boy's room,
career highlights
she could have seen herself,
but he was so tall,
looming over the rest,
helpful at home.

.....

...those telephone calls
“too much energy.”
She might have seen,
but he said they all lied,
and he's good with children.

.....

She should have seen,

but he was hers.

—From “The Tower,” by G.P.Elliott,
Copyright 1986.

In extreme cases, some students are “accidents waiting to happen.” Teachers who are able to recognize warning signs in elements of a student’s behavior or in the way he is being treated by classmates may try to approach the parents for help and may be brushed off. Some parents of either a target or a perpetrator may express the belief that dealing with this type of situation is part of life. They say the students just have to “tough it out and toughen up.”

One of the hardest things for most parents to admit is that their children may have a problem. Most parents want to believe in their children and will defend them. They may keep hoping that it is just a phase that has to be gone through or that this is part of growing up or if left alone things will “work themselves out.”

Everyone has the desire to save face whenever possible, and these parents are no exception. They know that their children may be playing the margins, but they also see the good and loving qualities that their children possess. It is just as important that this desire is honored as it is for the behavior to stop. Parents who might be cooperative instead might go on the defensive if they feel that their child is going to be used as “an example to others.”

Not one parent ever wants to say there is “something wrong with my child,” and should not be forced to do that. It is easier and more accurate to say that there may be something to correct with elements of our children’s behavior or some of the dynamics of the situations in which they interact with others.

Dignity and Respect must be extended to everyone or it winds up being extended to no one. This includes those students who engage in misconduct. This is not to say that there should not be corrective action taken. It is important to address the behavior while preserving the personal dignity of

the individual. This applies to both those who engage in mobbing and those who are targeted.

Ethical conduct is learned in school and at home and by simply walking around, living, and paying attention to how people treat one another.

Schools and communities have been moving toward character education programs and workshops for both parents and students. Often those who are running these programs express the view that the adults who take advantage of these programs are rarely the ones who could benefit the most from them. It is a continual source of frustration to those who are trying to make a difference that they are not able to connect with this group.

Addressing this issue can be very difficult when it is addressed on a single-issue or single-occurrence basis. However, when a code of conduct is established for all students and reinforced by a simple student-parent agreement it can become more manageable.

There is nothing wrong with setting expectations and “drawing the lines in the sand.” This also applies to treating people with dignity and respect because most people want to know where the lines are. Then if a person approaches the line or attempts to put a toe over it, they can be told that they need to step back. It doesn’t have to become a major issue.

In the movie *Stand and Deliver* the comment was made that the students in the math class could not handle the advanced subject because they were not competent. The teacher responded: “The students will rise to the level of expectation asked of them.”

This is an important point. We get what we expect. Most of us will either live up to or live down to expectations. Schools may be mandated to have some sort of zero-tolerance policy by governmental funding agencies, but the development, focus, and interpretation of such policies are open and flexible.

Negatively worded policies set expectations for negative behavior and the subsequent consequences. Positively worded policies set expectations for a higher expression of dignity and respect.

Terrorism and Hostages

“Don’t do anything, please. It will make it worse.” Many parents hear this statement from their mobbed children. These kids are being held hostage by terrorizing behavior in their own school. In a workplace-mobbing situation, the target has the option, however difficult it may be, to leave and go somewhere else. To escape to another environment in which they will feel needed and appreciated. Most students simply cannot leave and go to another school unless the whole family is uprooted and moves to another community or enrolls the student in a private school, which may not be feasible. Essentially, the students are trapped, with no opportunity to escape. Feelings of extreme depression or desperation often result. Judgment becomes clouded. Actions may take a tragic turn.

In the fall of 2000, a Canadian teenager hanged herself in the basement of her home because she could no longer withstand the tormenting of classmates. Those participating were taken to court and charged with criminal harassment. (One of them was convicted.)

In the United Kingdom suicides among children as a result of bullying or mobbing behavior is the subject of a groundbreaking book *Bullycide: Death at Playtime*. *Bullycide* is a word the authors Neil Marr and Tim Field “have coined to describe when bullied children choose suicide rather than face another day of bullying, harassment, and abuse.” Here is a thought-provoking excerpt from their book.

Conscious of the legal liability from any admission of responsibility, however small, the instinct of most schools...is to deny everything. "We've investigated and found no evidence" or "The children responsible have been talked to and the matter is resolved." Bullying is rarely resolved. It is a serial offence.

The world was stunned when Thomas Hamilton walked into the school in Dunblane in March 1996 and shot dead sixteen children and a teacher. Words could not express the magnitude and horror of such a senseless act.

Tragedies with multiple deaths are guaranteed front-page headlines whilst single deaths often do not attract attention, nor do they generate the same sense of shock. Our research reveals that each year in the UK at least sixteen children commit bullycide and around eighty children attempt bullycide. The number of children who think about bullycide is unknown.

Bullycide claims a Dunblane of children every year. Between the school massacre which shocked the world and the completion of this book, bullies have secretly, out of the headlines, been responsible for much more than a Dunblanescale slaughter of innocent lives.

Laws and policies regarding this type of conduct are passed as a result of such incidents and research. Training ensues, and action is taken. They are too late for the teenager who committed suicide, however. Too late for students who have been killed by other students who retaliated against such abuse.

In another worst-case scenario, the target of mobbing or bullying behavior may become the aggressor. Something inside the student finally says, "Enough." The student can't take any more mistreatment and retaliates, either spontaneously or by a planned act of violence. When this type of horrific situation occurs, the student who retaliates by externalizing his anger and despair in an act of violence is the one held accountable. That is, if the student is still alive, if he has not committed suicide after the act, which often is the case.

The fact that the student has been continually harassed, isolated, and excluded, that he has been terrorized on the bus going to school and had his personal property ruined or stolen, and that he has been subject to humiliation in countless ways—all these pale in comparison to the action he has taken.

Many adults say that we all had problems when we were in school, but we didn't take a gun and shoot someone over it. Times have changed. School athletic departments didn't have to circulate a statement of appropriate conduct for parents watching school sports events, either. But many have found that it is necessary in today's world.

The news is filled with stories about adult violence relating to student athletics, such as the Florida baseball coach who broke an umpire's jaw or the New England father who died after being beaten by another father at an ice hockey game. Both of these incidents took place in full view of the young players. There are many other examples. Some student athletic associations have gone so far as to require parents to take a sportsmanship class or sign an ethics code before their children are allowed to participate. (Access the online ERIC digest for an excellent article on violence in sports.)

Some common characteristics of the perpetrators of mass killings are isolation, paranoia, feelings of persecution, and preoccupation with survival. People who are being mobbed are often isolated first by others and then engage in self-isolation due to fear. They may develop feelings of paranoia and not know whom to trust. Personality changes may occur. They often suffer from acute anxiety disorder or even post-traumatic stress disorder just like those who have witnessed disasters or have been mugged, raped, or gone through war.

*Some Symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder**

- **Continually reliving the event/flashbacks**
- **Hyperalertness, easily startled, edgy**
- **Fatalistic outlook on life**
- **General emotional numbing**

- **Persisting anxiety**
- **Nightmares**
- **Insomnia**
- **Poor concentration**
- **uncontrolled acting out**
- **Attacks of intense anxiety or panic**
- **Feeling suicidal and/or homicidal**

* From *Mobbing: Emotional Abuse in the American Workplace*, by N. Davenport, R.Schwartz, and G.Elliott, 1999, Civil Society Publishing.

If you knew that the environment in your school had the potential to take a previously “normal” student and, through subtle and continual abuse at the hands of peers and others, trigger this kind of personality change, wouldn’t you want to take action? If you are thinking “it can’t happen here,” please think again. Take another look. None of the schools where extreme violence has occurred were in communities where people expected it or thought that it could happen to them.

Those who perpetrate and participate in mobbing are engaging in terrorism. That is a strong statement. Intentionally strong. First of all, this term is one that has especially negative connotations now and is one that most students would never identify with personally and it is important that a child never be labeled a terrorist. (The use of this term for my purposes in this book has nothing to do with the political forms of extremist organizations whose goals are to cause massive upheaval and destruction of societies.) However, when it is pointed out to students what those who perpetrate terrorism do and what they try to accomplish, they frequently will make a connection between their behavior and the effects that mobbing has on an individual. Making the connection creates awareness. That awareness can become an incentive to make a personal decision to change behavior that may be terrorizing to another student.

Why Mobbing Is a Form of Terrorism

What Terrorizing Behavior Does:

- ☞ **It gets others, through fear, to change their normal life patterns.**
- ☞ **It creates confusion and mistrust.**
- ☞ **It operates in secrecy or with a code of silence.**
- ☞ **It causes participants, when confronted, to lie about their intentions and participation.**

And...

- ☞ **Participants believe any behavior is justified by their motives.**
- ☞ **People who join in generally are convinced of this justification.**
- ☞ **They are afraid of being targeted themselves.**

Creating a Still, Small Voice

Schools, parents, and students all have to come together to make a difference in the overall situation. A sense of ethics plays a major role here.

Special needs teachers will confirm that students who don't know how to answer questions such as "What is a..." because of the way their brains process information can be taught how to ask themselves a series of questions internally so that they can give general descriptions. Strategies are needed.

Some people have a small internal voice that stops them from engaging in behavior that is hurtful. Other people do not have that sense of conscience, but it can be taught. It is taught by developing and introducing a set of internal questions and statements relating to treating people with dignity and respect.

Self-Questions and Statements

"Why am I doing or saying this?"

"Would I want that said or done to me?"

"Would I do this to my best friend?"

"Everything I say or do to another person matters."

"This person is more frightened and hurt than she looks."

"Everything I say or do to him leaves its mark on me, too."

"What I do or say to someone today will not be forgotten tomorrow."

"People will remember me by how I made them feel."

Awareness Is the Key to Prevention

Awareness is the key to stopping and preventing mobbing behavior from taking its toll. Every time I present an awareness program, some students will recognize themselves as either mobbers or targets. They have approached teachers and parents and said, “We have this going on. We have to do something to stop it.”

Insight and awareness are how it is recognized. It is stopped by people deciding not to participate. Let’s face it. Regardless of what the instigators may say or do, a mob cannot form if people don’t participate. That includes parents and teachers. Example is the most powerful education tool of all, especially when it comes to behavior.

I’ve been asked more than once, “What about teachers who do this?” My response is usually that such teachers are either unaware of what they are doing or are in the wrong profession. Abuse is abuse, and some are more than willing to engage in it under the heading of “discipline.” The many definitions of the word *discipline* have more to do with teaching than they do with punishment.

Teachers, counselors, and other school professionals sometimes promote and reinforce this type of behavior among themselves by gossiping or sharing horror stories about students and warning others about them. Sometimes this is done in the presence of the student. Sometimes it is done in the community where information that should be kept confidential is shared or opinions are circulated, along with speculation on the parenting that the student receives. No wonder some

parents and students may view the school as an adversary rather than as a partner.

Stopping this nightmare among students is difficult when adults in the community are actively demonstrating this same behavior. There have been some amazing stories of parents mobbing other parents, teachers, and students. Teachers can be overheard gossiping about students in the hallway between classes. Students who hear malicious gossip, rumors, and ridicule among the adults in their lives take that as a signal that it is acceptable behavior.

Here's an example of how insight and awareness can make a difference. A woman had read about mobbing and was telling someone about it. These two attended an aerobics class together. There was a relatively new member of the class who was rather uncoordinated and as a result was throwing everyone off their rhythm. Although she was friendly, the other class members talked about her, made fun of her behind her back, and wished she'd just drop out and leave. Suddenly one of the two women chatting about mobbing said, "'Oh my goodness! Are we mobbing this woman?'"

It was a revelation. They decided to get to know the woman better. They found that she was an intelligent professional person who did a lot of good work with teens. They found that when they looked past her loud voice and her uncoordinated movements she was a person whom they could like and respect. That's what the word *respect* means as I interpret it to "look again."

The woman is still in the class. She stands in the back row. And the others have stopped their mobbing behavior simply because they became aware of what they were doing and of the implications and potential results of their actions. Most of us choose to believe that we are basically good human beings. And we're right. The more aware we become of the fact that others are good human beings also, worthy and entitled to be treated with dignity and respect without exception, the closer we will be to recreating our world and helping to heal it. Awareness is the key.

“If I See Someone Being Mobbed, How Can I Help?”
Things You Can Say

- ⌘ **“That doesn’t make sense. is this a rumor? ”**
- ⌘ **“How do you know that? DO you have proof? ”**
- ⌘ **“I’m not going to participate in this.”**
- ⌘ **“Sounds like you’re trying to gang up on him or her.”**
- ⌘ **“Why are you making jokes about him or her? That wasn’t funny.”**
- ⌘ **“I don’t want to pick on anyone.”**

Things You Can Do

- ⌘ **Be kind to the targeted person.**
- ⌘ **Don’t participate.**
- ⌘ **Suggest that the target should tell them to stop.**
- ⌘ **Remember that many bullies back down when confronted.**

An Outrageous Suggestion

A story that I've heard from more than one student over the years is that the "cool kids" are unkind, territorial, and selective as a group. Another is that the "uncool kids" or those who are "on the edge" are usually more inclusive and friendlier to a wider variety of students without insisting that they meet a certain criteria.

Here's an outrageous suggestion for you. Instead of spending so much time targeting students who are on the edge in terms of dress, possible behaviors like smoking, and so on, try for one semester focusing on teaching dignity and respect to your "cool kids." See if it affects the overall climate of your school. Some of the mobbing or bullying behavior that occurs in schools emanates subtly from this select group of "cool kids," their parents, and their attitudes, and precipitates a lot of the behavior in others that winds up being addressed by all kinds of programs.

Similarity Training

During the Kennedy era, comedian David Frye did a sketch about a summit conference. The White House was trying to keep expenses down and decided to send out to a deli for sandwiches for lunch. The president was taking orders from the dignitaries when the representative from Egypt ordered a pastrami sandwich on white bread with lettuce and mayonnaise.

The representative from Israel spoke up, "Excuse me, sir."

"What do you want?" the Egyptian said testily.

"Look, I know we don't get along. You never listen to me. But this time, please listen. Pastrami don't go with white bread and lettuce and mayonnaise! Have it on rye bread with a glass of tea. You'll enjoy!"

"OK, I guess I'll take a chance."

"Good. And if you like pastrami, next time you're in the neighborhood drop by the house. My wife makes..."

Diversity training is well intentioned but approaches the need from the backdoor. The catchall phrase is to "celebrate our differences." A parent recently made the following observation: "Every time people talk about 'celebrating our diversity I say, 'Maybe that's what's wrong in this country. We should be celebrating our similarities and things we have in common as human beings rather than diversities. I think it's very easy to accept diversity if we already have a human bond with someone.'"

So many people walk out of diversity training confused, annoyed, frightened, and even angry. It may create more walls

than it can tear down because it often tries to create points of reference that don't resonate or because people can't connect. It also can wind up replacing one stereotype with another. Then when differences create conflict, we employ conflict resolution strategies to address the situation, and of course this embraces the concept of finding similarities to use as points of reference.

In reality, when we normally get together with a group of people to celebrate something, does the celebration ever have anything to do with our differences? No! There is a similarity or a point of commonality that brings people together and makes a connection though they may be a very diverse group. At that point there is the basis for communication, and interest in differences is a natural outcropping of that. An observation by Barney Mayse, an adult with disabilities, verifies this view:

“As a person with physical challenges I watch diversity training with amusement. We are attempting to make round pegs fit square holes. Fact is: we are all human first. You may be female, I may be male. There may be other differences, but underneath the differences in dress, thoughts, beliefs, physical appearance we are all human. In a perfect world, that would provide a bond, one to another. In a less than perfect world (which is the one we live in) we emphasize the differences, put them under a microscope, and seek to find advantage in our differences.

“I have learned over the course of my twelve years of life with a chronic disease that whether you are in perfect health or have a terminal or chronic disease, you are still first and foremost a human being with human needs, wants and desires.”

Many years ago I met a medical student from South America who was continuing his education in the States. We became friends. He introduced me to his circle of friends from that part of the world and included me in get-togethers, always prefacing his introduction with the phrase, “She’s not like an American girl.” I found out later that this was his way of telling his other friends that I did not fit a stereotype.

Did I speak Spanish? No.

Did we talk about “cultural differences”? No.

Did I know about his country? Not much, mainly where it was on the map.

None of these things really seemed to matter. We were interested in getting to know each other as people, not as nationalities or cultures. We didn’t begin with assumptions or preconceived ideas. We talked about our work, our hopes and dreams, our philosophies of life, our beliefs, and our families. We shared some common interests that we enjoyed. We introduced each other to some new interests. Just like friends anywhere, we were looking for common elements to share rather than differences to try to overcome. Our differences were interesting to learn about rather than barriers because we found things to like about each other first. And of course we found them because that was our intent. Similarity rather than diversity made the connection. We accepted each other “as is” and had a lot of fun in the process.

This same friend gave me a copy of *The Little Prince* as a gift. In that story, the prince has a flower on his home planet who has told him that she is “one of a kind” and has to be treated specially because of that. When he travels to Earth, he finds a garden filled with roses that look just like his flower. At first he is saddened. Later he realizes that his flower was telling the truth. That she is “unique in all the world” because of their friendship, because of the connection that they have made.

So often we judge others rather than expressing acceptance. Since we are all one-of-a-kind events, “unique in all the world,” someone else’s expression is never going to be a clone of our own whether they grew up next door or halfway around the world, on Earth or on the Little Prince’s planet. Treating people with dignity and respect is an exercise in finding those points where we connect. Dignity involves allowing others to define themselves rather than labeling them. Respect involves acknowledging and appreciating that individuality without judging it. Accepting each other “as is.”

Stereotypes: A Two-Dimensional View of a Multidimensional World

Stereotypes are a natural result of the way the brain processes and stores information. Without the ability to categorize in this way, we'd have no points of reference. This is called inferential thinking. We need it for survival. That's why you know that if you rub up against a plant with three shiny leaves and a red stem you'll probably get a rash. Stereotypes have to do with emotionally based experiences, which result in expectations, predictions, and reactions to that stored information. My apologies to the plant lovers who will argue that each plant is individual and unique. You're right.

Stereotypes have much to do with dominance and power. We were brought up with them in many different disguises and formats, but they've been pretty consistent over the years. Let me explain the way inferential thinking works. Our brains file information, and each file is labeled. When we encounter something new, we look for points of reference. First we look for things that are similar to other things we've encountered, then we look for differences, then we assign a label to identify what we've encountered. The label is the stereotype. We look for a file folder with the same label in our brains and then pop the situation, experience, or person into that folder. That leads to such assumptions as "been there, done that, got the T-shirt."

Understanding that we're all unique and that all situations are also unique precludes doing much of this type of labeling beyond the reaction that establishes our initial points of reference. From there we must respond rather than react, think and assess rather than snap-judge, and respond to the reality of

who the person is and not to the concept of the general category in which we found the initial points of reference. Do not stereotype me because I'm female, have blond hair, or gesture a lot with my hands. There's a lot more to me, and there's a lot more to you. Some of who I am may indeed fall in line with a stereotype—just as some of who you are may fall into another or the same one—but we have to launch our voyage from there.

Stereotypes aren't all bad; they're just not the whole picture. They are a point of beginning not ending. If we didn't have this ability, we'd all be walking around like Vinnie Barbarino in *Welcome Back Kotter*, the 1970s television show, holding our heads in our hands and lamenting, "Oh, I'm so confused!"

These points of reference have behaviors attached to them so that we know what to say and do. They have to do with our own comfort zones, our "mental" boxes. Anything that departs from that makes us feel really uncomfortable because we have to create new points of reference each time we meet someone. However, if this is looked at as a "voyage of discovery" rather than a choppy sea in a rowboat, it can be exciting, enriching, and just plain fun! To paraphrase Proust, "The real voyage of discovery lies not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes."

Some feel inadequate when they can't live up to stereotypical expectations. Others rebel and go as far in the other direction as they can, even though some elements of the stereotype are comfortable; they fear being sucked into the whole package and losing their identity. This conflict can cause internal discomfort, and sometimes this discomfort can lead to violence.

It's no secret that people are indeed different, in thought processing of the brain, in physical construction, and in reactions to different kinds of stimuli. Some of this is cultural and some of it is DNA memory. So what? We are all different not only with regard to the categories of gender, race, stature, and so forth, but also with regard to ourselves as individuals. Before the twentieth century being different was more of a foregone conclusion, and no one was really looking to analyze

and categorize us to the extent that has caused so much confusion in our contemporary world.

The downside of stereotypes becomes apparent when they precipitate violence, because, as I said earlier, they have to do with dominance and power. Variations in behavior and attitude trigger in each of us a common response. We conclude that these variances must be temporary manifestations of insanity, evil, stupidity, or sickness. In other words, we view them in terms of flaw and affliction. Then of course we feel obligated to try to correct these flaws in others.

This devalues the other person as an individual and can encourage a person to feel pretty insecure, as if being who you are isn't OK. And those of us who remember the old transactional analysis model know that if you don't feel that you are OK, it affects your interactions with others, and those interactions from that feeling can become violent. Violent behavior, when distilled to its essence, is basically an exercise in power, whether it is perpetrated by an individual or by a group of individuals, whether as small as a gang or as large as a country.

People are naturally self-centered. That's how we are made. We are trapped within these biological units we call bodies. It gets pretty lonely in here, so we reach out to connect with others. That attempt at connecting is called communication, in all of its forms. But because we're self-centered, we translate everything that comes in through our senses in terms of how it relates to us, to our experience. So we wind up taking everything personally. Everyone does this. Therefore, all of our words and actions have to do with us, and all of our perceptions have to do with us. When we communicate with someone, we are doing that in terms of ourselves, but the other person perceives our communication to be in terms of himself or herself, because that person is self-centered, too. It's a wonder we can coexist or connect at all!

First we must begin by recognizing that although we're self-centered, we're also thinking beings. We can consciously get outside of that mental box and recognize the tremendous

personal power that we have to make another person's day joyous or miserable.

The interactions we have with anyone will affect at least the next five people that person encounters. This is power. Much of violence—whether a physical, mental, or emotional expression of dominance—is an attempt at exercising personal power. This emanates from a view that we have no power or not enough power, and we may strive to regain that sense of power by diminishing another human being. Recognizing that we already have that power, that we do make a difference, that we have an impact on the world around us and on those persons whom we encounter, can sometimes alleviate that need.

Labels are assigned to us by others who are leading with their conclusions based upon personal perceptions and experiences. Stereotypes are a two-dimensional way of looking at a multidimensional world. They are inadequate and distorted caricatures of reality. Although we continually stereotype others, we resent it when others apply stereotypes to us. Some do not wish to be known for fear of being labeled further; others long to be understood or to be known for the labels they assign to themselves. Our personal dignity consists of the labels we choose to own.

How many enjoy being compared to another person, being sized up and assigned a value based on that comparison? The truth is that to each person there is no comparison. And that is true of everyone we encounter. When we speak of individuals, that is the essence of the word itself.

We can't hope to understand another person fully, or even to understand ourselves fully. But we can look for things to appreciate, we can make those connections first as we process the information that is received through our senses. We can't help but look for similarities and differences and pull out that file folder. However, we can choose what similarities we're looking for, positives over negatives, and then continue to look for the elements of that person that we wish to discover, that make that person unique, precious, special, a once-in-all-eternity, one-of-a-kind event. We see what we expect to see,

and if we don't see it, we will continue to look until we find even a small indication of it.

In his book *Please Understand Me II*, David Keirse talks about the fact that people are simply different from each other. We all have a tendency to misunderstand each other because we look for or want others to mirror ourselves, to be copies of ourselves for the purpose of self-validation. And of course this is a project doomed to failure before it even begins.

All people want and have the right to be treated with dignity and respect. No exceptions. Most people agree with the first of these statements, especially when it applies to them. We all relate to that. It's the "no exceptions" part that is the real challenge.

We all are entitled to be free to choose the labels we wish to own. We can do this by looking and allowing ourselves to become "confused" for long enough to look with new eyes at one another. There is nothing wrong with stereotypes as long as we're not owned by them and do not force others into them. We can pick out certain elements of the stereotypes if they fit us and own them if we want to. That has to do with thought and choice. One of the most important that all have in common is the knowledge that we are needed and have value.

Student Discussion Facilitation Questions

Fifty-four questions organized in a progression to promote discussion. Designed to develop student awareness and for school officials to determine the climate of mobbing or bullying behavior and the potential for violence. A tool for evaluating the effectiveness of programs that are already in place to discourage this type of behavior.

We all have heard of bullying. Every person has a different view-point of what it is and how it feels and why it happens. We want to talk about some of your views and ideas about this among your peers both in and out of school.

1. How do you define bullying?
2. Have you ever heard of mobbing? If not, what comes to mind when you hear the word?
3. Are there certain people that you automatically label that way or assume that will act like that?
4. Are they teachers or students or both?
5. If this happens in hallways or in classrooms, do you think the teachers are aware of this kind of behavior?
6. What do they do about it? Do you think they care?
7. Do you see people making fun of others and excluding them?
8. What about rumors?

9. Do any of these bother you?
10. Do you see adults doing this kind of thing, too?
11. If this kind of thing makes you feel uncomfortable, what do you do about it?
12. Do you feel that there isn't much anyone can do about this kind of behavior?
13. If it was up to you, how would you change things?
14. Before making friends with someone, do you think about whether they will fit into your group?
15. Do people call others names that hurt?
16. There are always different kinds of groups of friends. We all know that. Who are considered to be the "cool" people here?
17. What kind of people, in your opinion, will never fit in no matter what they do?
18. Do you ever feel that way yourself?
19. Can people "float" from one group to another and be accepted?
20. Can you share some times that you or others felt either worried or angry about a group of students that seemed to think they were better than others?
21. Do some students seem to go out of their way to avoid other students?
22. Do students who seem to get a kick out of putting other people down belong to a specific group?
23. Do certain groups do this as a regular routine or just individual students?
24. What types of people or groups at school make you feel angry, hurt, or resentful?
25. Do you believe that these people or groups do this on purpose?
26. Do you feel safe riding the school bus or walking to school with regard to the behavior of other students?
27. When do you hear students make jokes about threatening someone or violence?
28. Is school a safe place for you to be, or so-so?

29. When are students most likely to not get along?
30. Under what circumstances do you wish people would be nicer and leave each other alone?
31. Would you feel OK going to an athletic event or other school function alone?
32. Do you feel safer when you're with your own group of friends?
33. Are there some students or teachers who you wish would just go away?
34. What happens to new students socially?
35. Are people nice to new students initially and then tend to drop them unless they fit into a specific group?
36. Do you wish you could get involved in some activities and the groups that sponsor them, but feel that you can't?
37. What happens to students who report incidents to teachers?
38. If you saw a student being picked on or made fun of, would you step in to help or step out of the way?
39. Would your taking action depend on who was involved?
40. Do you think that students understand what's going on here more than the school staff or parents do?
41. Do you feel that the climate between some of the students at this school is an "accident waiting to happen"?
42. Are there teachers or school staff you feel you can trust to talk to about things that worry you?
43. Do you ever just not bother to talk to someone, even if you trust them, because you feel it won't make any difference?
44. What would you do to educate school staff and parents about relationships here?
45. What types of situations seem to cause you or others you know the most stress at school?
46. What would you like to change if you could?

47. How trustworthy do you feel the school staff is in solving problems between students?
48. Is there a way for bullying or ganging up on someone to be stopped here? What would it take?
49. Do you feel that school staff ignore or make excuses for problems?
50. What are your ideas for making things better for everyone?
51. You know a lot of schools have taken steps to help avoid violence and bullying. What is done about it here? Do you think it works?
52. Why do you think kids threaten to do violence or joke about it?
53. Do you think that something extreme like that could ever happen here? Why or why not?
54. What would you like to do to help make sure that it doesn't?

Making Restitution

When asked, most people who have been mobbed have wanted nothing more than an apology and for the behavior to stop. Sounds awfully simple, doesn't it? It is important to understand that, without the healing that comes from being asked for forgiveness and being able to extend it, the long-range effects of mobbing can go on for a lifetime.

In addition to the above, extra support for the target of mobbing is necessary if the individual is to recover from the experience. Many people who have been targeted by this behavior suffer from acute anxiety disorder or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). People who have been raped or mugged, have witnessed disasters, or who have been in wars, suffer from the symptoms of PTSD. These are serious conditions that require specialized counseling and treatment for recovery. A counselor who specializes in trauma is highly recommended in these cases.

It is unrealistic to expect that the natural groups that form within any school or community will dissolve. But we can teach and expect all of the people in those groups to treat themselves and others, whoever they may be, with dignity and respect. No exceptions.

All people want and have the right to be treated with dignity and respect. No exceptions. Everyone agrees with the dignity and respect statement, especially when it applies to themselves or to those they care about. It's the no-exceptions part that becomes challenging. But if it is not for everyone, it winds up being for no one. Including us.

Treating others and ourselves with dignity and respect is something that most of us already know how to do. But it is something that many of us forget to do or have forgotten. We must remember how to do this and do it once again. It takes courage and practice to bring it into the forefront of our awareness.

Many people are walking around with a deep anger and dissatisfaction inside of them and don't know where it's coming from. When we see road rage erupting and other types of violence, when we turn on the evening news, we see more evidence of this happening. It becomes clear that we are on a collision course with something extremely unpleasant if we don't clean up our collective act with regard to the way we treat each other.

We live in complicated times, and some of the issues that we face appear to be overwhelming. But the solutions can be simple, though not simply achieved. It takes insight, awareness, and paying attention to what is going on around us in each situation. We can take a bit of time to reflect before acting. We can acknowledge the unique, precious, one-of-a-kind event that each of us is and then extend that awareness to others, one person at a time.

How do we complete this simple task if we ourselves are among those who feel that anger and frustration? That we have been treated as objects for too long? That is a key issue. We must begin with forgiveness. This may sound impossible, but it is the doorway to recreating our world and helping to heal it.

It's been said that resentment or inability to forgive is like an invisible umbilical cord that connects us to the person or situation that has caused us distress. It will continue to feed us anger, hurt, and fear through that connection until we cut it. Forgiveness is not something that we do for the source of what has injured us. It is an act that sets us free. It cuts the invisible cord so that we can move forward with our lives, looking at each day freshly, with anticipation, and a new sense of independence.

More important forgiveness allows us to see ourselves with new eyes. Each of us views ourselves and our world and

experiences through a personal lens. The lens is often clouded, diminishing our ability to see others and ourselves with the dignity and respect to which we are entitled by virtue of who we truly are. We allow the lens to be clouded by behavior, experiences, comparisons, and expectations.

If you have ever worn glasses or sunglasses that have become smeared or dirty, or looked through a window that needed cleaning, you know how you became used to looking at the world through them, for usually the soil accumulates gradually. When the lenses are cleaned, the new view is refreshing and often surprising.

Cleaning our glasses or sunglasses each morning before they are put on is a regular habit of many of us. Practicing forgiveness and connecting with our inner sense of dignity and respect is an exercise in cleaning the inner lens through which we view ourselves, the people we encounter, and the situations in which we find ourselves. This also can be done each morning before we begin our day or each evening before we go to sleep.

This act is a powerful exercise in releasing us from the events of the past, whether positive or negative. It allows us to experience the present moment. It does not involve the future, which is unknown. It enables us to be fully alive.

Each morning we awaken as new beings, for we cannot be what we were yesterday even if we should wish to be. Each time we cut the invisible cord to yesterday we have the opportunity to recreate ourselves and express the true nature of what we were intended to be.

Treating each other with dignity and respect, or not doing so, seriously impacts the future—for all of us.

Dignity and Respect, No Exceptions

When you decide to promote dignity and respect no exceptions, that means what it says. No exceptions. There can be no such thing as a “throwaway” human being. We certainly know and acknowledge that there are people with serious issues and that some of them need a different environment than the school that they attend. Unfortunately, some students who can benefit from a simple change of attitude toward them are branded “bad kids” and figuratively “flushed” by teachers and school officials.

Others are those who fall between the cracks. A number of years ago I offered a two-part Dignity and Respect communication workshop as an after-school program for a middle school. We were hoping to attract some of the students who were not involved in after-school activities, and we did that. What we did not expect was the strong interest among students who were already involved in sports and other activities. This two-afternoon program became an opportunity for students from different campus groups, who usually did not interact, to be brought together voluntarily to see one another with new eyes.

This opportunity was quickly thwarted by the athletic coach. He refused to excuse interested players from practice and complained to the school principal. The irate music director, who had a few interested students as well, was close behind. Several players defied the coach and attended the first day, expressing regret that they would not be able to attend the second session under threat of being thrown off of the team.

Had we anticipated that the program might generate so much interest, we would have scheduled the sessions differently. Incorporating Dignity and Respect into school programming necessitates support from everyone in the school environment, including parents. We must provide them with information and, above all, model the principles of dignity and respect. We must live the philosophy to achieve this goal.

There are some parents who take issue with character education and similar programs. But you will find few who will argue with the concept of dignity and respect. It is what all people want, regardless of their age, background, education, social or economic status, or any other classification one can devise, including individuals who are extremely prejudiced. It is the ultimate common denominator. The no-exceptions part of the message will be the greatest challenge, but if dignity and respect progresses from awareness to action based on conscious decision and then to internalized behavior, there is a greater chance for success.

Self-Awareness: Key Points

Elaborate on these key points to help students to take control of their attitude:

- We have incredible power over each other.
- Our interaction with anyone impacts at least the next five people that he or she encounters. This is power.
- Each of us is unique, precious, one of a kind.
- People are self-centered and take things personally.
- How we feel about ourselves when we're with others determines how we behave toward them.
- All people want and have the right to be treated with dignity and respect.
- Disrespect is investing in the weakness of others.
- Respect is investing in our own strength.
- Reaction is an emotional reflex; when we react, we are controlled.

- Response requires thought; when we respond, we take control.
- Our attitudes cause us to assign labels and values.
- We cannot change others, but we can change our attitudes, reactions, and responses. This is power.

Developing Personal Dignity: Key Points

Elaborate on these key points to help students differentiate between the labels that others give them and the labels they are willing to accept for themselves. Encourage students to define themselves by making a list of positive descriptors: labels they are willing to own.

- Stereotypes form because of the way the brain processes information.
- We look for similarities, then differences, then we assign a label.
- We file people in mental file folders with labels based on our experience.
- How are we labeled by others?
- What labels are we willing to own?
- Similarities are more important than differences.
- Similarities give us points of reference and build bridges between differences.
- All people want and have the right to be treated with dignity and respect as individuals. No exceptions.

The Mirror Exercise

From “The Power of Dignity and Respect” Workshop

This exercise is a self-esteem builder using positive self-talk.

1. **Look at yourself in the mirror.**
2. **Look into your eyes.**
3. **Smile.**
4. **Say “Hi!”**
5. **Do this three times.**

6. **Keep looking into your eyes.**
 7. **Say “I’m good enough, I’m smart enough, and gosh darn it, people like me!”**
 8. **Say “welcome to a new day—full of limitless possibilities for great things!”**
 9. **Say “Every day in every way I’m getting better and better and better!”**
 10. **Or pick out other personal and positive statements that you like.**
 11. **Practice this every morning for at least three weeks.**
-
12. **During the day, make eye contact with others, smile, and say “Hi!” (Don’t worry about whether they smile back or not—just do it.) Start with your family in the morning. Don’t exclude anyone. It doesn’t matter whether you like them or not or even know them.**
 13. **If you happen to see yourself in a mirror, window, or other reflecting surface during the day, check your facial expression. Smile.**
 14. **This exercise releases positive endorphins into your body and affects your attitude and what kind of day you have. It also affects what kind of day others have.**

“Don’t Take Things Personally”: Key Points

Elaborate on these key points to help students become more aware of the many causes of stress and to encourage them to give others the benefit of the doubt rather than reacting.

List and Explain:

- Common causes of stress.

- Impacts of stress, biological changes.
- Impacts of stress-induced biological changes on communication.

Teach These Actions:

- Anger is a secondary emotion. Address the primary emotion and anger dissipates.
- Don't take someone else's behavior personally.
- Practice response instead of reaction.

“Get that look off your face.” “What took?”: Nonverbal Key Points

Elaborate on these key points to help students identify forms of nonverbal communication beyond the standard “body language” interpretation.

- Explain nonverbal signals in terms of traffic signals: Green, Yellow, Red.
- Nonverbal signals indicate how open someone is to communication.
- Nonverbal signals affect our reactions and responses.
- We can control our own nonverbal signals.
- People often take others' nonverbal signals personally.
- People often communicate by leading with conclusions based on nonverbal signals.
- Keep your own nonverbal signals in the “green zone” and watch what happens.

“But all I said was...”: Verbal Key Points

Elaborate on these key points to help students differentiate between words and other forms of verbal communication.

- Words make up only 7 percent of communication.
- Communication is 38 percent verbal.

- Tone, pitch, resonance, breathing, and paralanguage (noises that are not words) are components of the verbal message.
- Word choices trigger memories, perceptions, and emotions that have nothing to do with the message.
- What is referred to as “Double messages” occur when verbal and nonverbal signals don’t match.
- Double messages cause mistrust, because they confuse.

***“Hear what I’m feeling”:* Listening Skills**

Key Points

Elaborate on these key points to help students demonstrate better listening.

- Effective listening involves nonverbal, verbal, and word messages.
- *Listen* and *silent* contain the same letters—to really listen we have to be silent and attentive.
- Reflective listening means to become a mirror to the other person’s feelings without judging or offering advice.
- Reflective listening does not mean parroting what the other person said.
- Reflective listening is not an exact science.
- Anger is a secondary emotion. Acknowledge the feeling beneath the anger, and anger dissipates.
- Anger met with anger causes more anger.

***“No one understands me”:* Appreciation**

and Trust Key Points

Elaborate on these key points to help students establish trust relationships.

- Most people would rather be appreciated than understood.
- We can express appreciation even to people we don’t know.
- Keeping nonverbals in the green zone communicates appreciation.
- How we communicate affects trust.

- Double messages undermine trust.
- Consistency is critical.
- Keeping promises helps establish trust.
- People like to know what to expect.
- We are the determining factor.
- All people want and have the right to be treated with dignity and respect.

Tips for Better Communication and Building Trust

Adapted from Innovations Training Workshop

“Dignity and Respect Communication: The Fragile Element”

Trust is based on consistency and knowing what to expect. Following are a few examples of simple strategies that build positive relationships and help others trust us. None of them is new or difficult. *The key is awareness and remembering to do them consistently!*

- ☞ ***Start each day by sharing a positive event or something humorous.***
- ☞ ***Smile.*** Be more aware of your nonverbal signals and watch what happens.
- ☞ ***Practice “Gattitude.”*** Have a gratitude attitude.
- ☞ ***Compliment others regularly and sincerely.*** Everyone likes to be appreciated.
- ☞ ***Look for what’s right Comment on it.*** If you think it and it’s positive, say it!
- ☞ ***Be honest.*** It’s possible to say what’s on your mind without being mean about it.
- ☞ ***Try not to take negatives personally.*** Sometimes we’re just in the wrong place at the wrong time and get the flack. we’re all “mixed bags of baggage.”
- ☞ ***Give the other person the benefit of the doubt.*** We all have days when we only remove one foot from our mouths to insert the other.
- ☞ ***Say please and thank you.*** What used to be called common courtesy is no longer as common as it used to be. These simple terms convert demands to requests

and express immediate appreciation. Remember to smile when you say them!

↳ ***Practice forgiveness.* No one's perfect. No one. It may take a big person to apologize, but it takes an equally big person not to hold a grudge.**

Suspicion and mistrust are created when people don't know what to expect! You will probably get some positive responses to these quickly. But if they are new behaviors to you it will take some time for people to trust your new "style."

One person who began smiling and being more positive and appreciative when he hadn't been before was amazed that initially people became nervous and wondered whether he was "up to something!" He struck with it was consistend and before too long it made a huge difference in communication at school, at work, and at home. A real "win-win" experience!

Summary of Recommendations and Strategies

Since many people like having a “cookbook” of things to do and not to do, this short chapter will list some recommendations. Notice that since the root cause of behavior is internal attitude, most of these recommendations are meant to encourage changes in attitude. They are intended as guidelines and launch points for consideration, not directives that are written in stone.

SEE IT

1. Develop an awareness program for students, parents, teachers, and others that includes what mobbing looks like, sounds like, and feels like.
2. Be *real* rather than speaking from a “position.”
3. Be alert. Pay attention to what is going on around you as well as to your own attitudes and behavior.

STOP IT

1. Discipline means to teach the rules and how to follow them. Set expectations instead of dealing out punishment.
2. Remember to ask questions and listen.
3. Trust your instincts, but don't lead with your conclusions.
4. Keep in mind that there is no such thing as a “throwaway human being.”

5. Separate the person from the behavior: address the behavior without devaluing the individual.
6. Be honest about what you've seen, heard, or discerned.
7. Ask students what they believe is "the right thing" to do.
8. Model the behavior that you want to see students emulate.
9. Resist a heavy-handed approach. It is possible to be firm without being cruel.
10. Remember that all persons involved have a constitutional right to due process. Make sure your intercept process allows for this.
11. Have consequences that fit the offenses.
12. Don't be afraid to be positively creative with correction and allow for this in your policy guidelines.
13. Resist a one-size-fits-all approach to addressing negative behavior. Treat each person and situation individually.

PREVENT IT

1. Remember that insight and awareness play a major role in prevention.
2. Review your current policies, including zero tolerance.
3. Rework, restate, redefine, and revise both the policies and the approach to them, if necessary.
4. Begin with the end in mind: What is your goal?

Pick only one of the following options:

- a. To create a safe and respectful climate for all students.
- b. To eliminate undesirables from the school.

Your choice will give you insight into how you have interpreted your policies and the image that you convey.

5. Communicate consistently with staff and students to emphasize positives.
6. Establish a code of conduct based upon dignity and respect that is simple and easy to understand.

7. Involve everyone in the development of the code of conduct based on dignity and respect students, teachers, parents, others.
8. Implement a “We don’t do that here” approach.
9. Be consistent and kind with enforcement of the code.

When it comes to addressing negative behavior, it has been said that many will hack away at the branches while only one will get to the root. If people treated each other with dignity and respect, mobbing would not be an issue. We can address the behavior, in essence hack away at the branches, or attempt to address the roots, which are the attitudes underlying the behavior. These recommendations will help you determine more of the root causes of mobbing or bullying behavior and facilitate equitable treatment of individuals.

Part 2

Essays to Promote Insight and Awareness: Food For Thought

Stories, Essays, and Quotes To promote Dignity and Respect Insight and Awareness Inspiration and Motivation And to support the ideas and concepts presented in this book.

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The Magic That Is You

We all have idiosyncrasies. Some people call them “personal warts.” I like to call them the magic that makes us the unique individuals that we are. Some of these in others may be irritating to us, especially if they are very different from our own. When we accept them as part of the magic that makes that person unique and special, we may find that some of those irritating ways are essential to the expression of that person—and may even contribute to other qualities that we find more appealing.

I’ve found that people who truly accept and appreciate themselves positively, just as they are, generally extend that to others. They don’t compare and they don’t judge—that kind of thinking stems from a certain level of internal nonacceptance. Feelings of superiority usually launch themselves from the opposite feeling—in an attempt to achieve some balance.

People often make resolutions to change what they feel are personal negatives without realizing that they are engaging in self put-downs. Treating people with dignity and respect of course, has to begin with treating ourselves that way. Without that, we have no points of reference from which to begin. Things that bug us about others usually do so because we take them personally. Realizing that they are just part of the magic that is that person takes the focus away from us. And if we want to treat others with dignity and respect—that is just where the focus should be.

Crossing the Bridge to Forgiveness

When we are deeply hurt by another person's actions, it may take months or years for us to be able to cross the bridge to forgiveness. On the side where we begin are our feelings of hurt, pain, anger, frustration, or humiliation that we must leave behind us. We begin in the past. On the other side of the bridge is the future. The bridge is like a narrow footbridge swaying in the wind. We can't take anything of the past with us if we intend to arrive safely on the other side. No excess baggage can come along. The bridge can only sustain our own weight. And we need both hands to hold onto its flimsy rope railings.

I wrote about this bridge years ago in one of my poems. Here is part of it

The narrow footbridge sways in wind
Only myself to confuse my steps
Nothing distracts from the opposite shore
And yet the bridge slats separate
Cause feet to jump like a chess knight
One over, two forward
Two over, one back
And the groaning shivers the rope
That slides in my grip—a hairy thing.

So how do we accomplish this? Here is a technique that I developed a number of years ago during one of the many difficult times that we all experience in our lives. I saw myself driving my car up the interstate in a severe snowstorm. I was

warm and safe in a reliable vehicle. There was no other traffic on this highway but me. Up ahead there was a vehicle on the side of the road. Stranded. The driver inside was the person who had hurt me.

The first time I saw this image in my mind, I laughed, made an obscene gesture at this person, and thought, you deserve this, and kept on driving. I wanted revenge but not the responsibility for perpetrating it. That told me I had not begun to cross the bridge. As time went on, I kept bringing the image back to mind, and I noticed as my ability to forgive and move on developed, my behavior toward the stranded motorist changed. At another point I just drove by and ignored him. Later I drove by but got off the highway and reported that the person was stranded. Initially, it was many miles and exits before I could do this. Later, it became the next exit.

Did I finally get to the point at which I stopped to help? Yes. Had I crossed the bridge? Not quite. My behavior toward this person went through a metamorphosis with each imagining. The things I said and did, the interactions, became more impersonal over time, until I finally was able to see this other person as simply a fellow human being in need of assistance that I was able to give without expecting anything in return. When I reached that point my journey across the bridge was finished, and my own healing was complete. I was able to move on.

This technique worked for me. Did it take a long time? Yes. Have I had to use it more than once? Yes. Does it get easier each time? No. Is it worth it? Yes!

When we withhold forgiveness, we are keeping ourselves caught in a negative pattern of self-abuse without even knowing it. We perpetuate our pain and persecute ourselves when we keep unforgiving thoughts and feelings alive. We can even make ourselves physically ill as a result of this.

Often in our lives we think we have moved on from experiences, but we are unable to cross the bridge to forgiveness. Why is this important? Because of what is waiting for us on the other side: our life, waiting to be lived fully and not halfway or encumbered.

You may wish to imagine some other scenario. Something else may work better for you in gauging where you are on the bridge to forgiveness. But do cross it. No matter how long it takes. It is one of the greatest gifts you can give yourself.

Forgiveness isn't something we do for the person we are forgiving. It is a gift that we give ourselves.

A Hard Lesson in Dignity and Respect

One beautiful summer evening when I was eight years old, I sat cross-legged on the floor watching TV. Too close, as usual. My grandmother was sitting way at the back of the room in an easy chair, watching with me and doing the mending. My mom hated to sew, and would save it all up in a laundry basket. Whenever my grandfather was out of town on business for more than a day or two, my grandmother would come and stay with us and the mending would get done. Always while sitting in that chair and watching TV.

My grandmother wasn't well educated. I don't know if she even finished high school. Probably not. Back in her day a high school diploma was a major accomplishment. She was an immigrant who, at age three, entered the United States at Ellis Island with her mother, who herself was only eighteen. My grandmother was forty years old when I was born, and at the time this story takes place, younger than I am now.

The police had been looking for someone who had committed a pretty horrible murder. Certainly it seemed more of a rarity then than it is now, to be broadcast in the way it was. They didn't give as many details back then as they do now, don't work on the emotions as much as the media does now, but they told enough to horrify me. There was a news bulletin that interrupted the programming. The murderer had been caught. And once again, there was an overview of the details of the crime.

I was incensed, outraged, furious at this man I didn't know. I felt hatred and the desire for vengeance welling up inside of

me. And I expressed it verbally, with all the emotion that I felt inside, holding nothing back. I said that I hoped that the authorities would pay kind for kind, that this criminal would be tortured the way he had tortured his victim, strung up from the rafters as I thought he deserved. I'm almost ashamed to admit that, but I was a kid and as human as any of us.

My grandmother absolutely exploded. She rose from her chair and raised her voice to me, which she rarely did, "Stop it! Don't ever say that! That's someone's baby, someone's little boy, someone's child."

She didn't mean that the criminal shouldn't be dealt with or let off. She was also sickened by the act. She was addressing my attitude. One that many people emulate. This was an early lesson in "Dignity and respect. No exceptions." Not easily achieved. I knew she was right I had held my baby brother in my arms. I had seen the open, trusting, hopeful spirit reaching out to be loved. Trying to imagine this perpetrator in that way was really difficult for me to do. I didn't want to. It was easier just to be angry and think of him in terms of what he had done. Yet I knew in my heart that she spoke the truth. It had been so at one time, long ago. It was humbling.

You can't fight evil with evil, or legislate insight and awareness. These last have to come from within. Separating people from their actions is one of the many steps on that winding road.

Always a Winner

To paraphrase Wayne Dyer, Ph.D., Maslow's "self-actualized person" can be defined as follows: independent of the good opinion of others; not invested in the control of others; involved in process rather than outcome. At the top of the pyramid graphic is a "winner."

A recent commercial portrays the winner of an event graciously congratulating his competitor on a good effort and thanking him. Then we get to hear what the person is really thinking: "Ha, ha. I'm better than you are."

There will always be people and situations in our lives that will take a greater or lesser position to ourselves and our own situations. And of course, being human, we're all naturally self-centered, take things personally, and react unless we think it through.

Winning or losing means we're competing with someone else. When we compete with others, we set ourselves up. It may be too hard, and we'll lose. But even worse, it may be too easy, and we'll still lose. When we compete with ourselves, we always win. We grow. We push ahead. We achieve and accomplish. We become caught up in process instead of outcome. Our focus turns to what we're doing rather than what someone else is doing. What we think becomes more important to us than what others think.

When we compete and compare ourselves with others, we look for negatives, get involved in power struggles, and pay more attention to shortcomings and failure than potential and

growth. So even if we win temporarily, in the long run we lose by focusing on negatives rather than positives.

This doesn't mean that we shouldn't have goals or dream of achieving great things. But true success is based upon something other than dominating and diminishing another person. It means appreciation rather than comparison. Acknowledging others and ourselves as the unique individuals that we are. Taking another step toward the essence of dignity and respect

Appreciation vs. Understanding

Would you rather be appreciated or understood? Think about it. Most respondents say they'd rather be appreciated. Appreciation has everything to do with being treated with dignity and respect as an individual. When we're appreciated, we're accepted, for who we are, just as we are.

We can't hope to completely understand each other. We tend to lead with our conclusions while operating from a basis of our own experience. Giving each other the benefit of the doubt, looking for something to appreciate in another person, and then expressing that appreciation honestly and immediately goes a long way toward establishing and maintaining trust by honoring the individual. Recently I remarked to a man that his wife was a smart woman. He agreed and said, "I probably should tell her that." I replied, "Do it! Now!"

Too often we notice positive qualities and we think positive thoughts about others but don't express them. If you think it and it's positive, say it! You may not have another chance to capture that moment.

Lasting Gifts

The most important gifts are not those that you can hold in your hand. These, in their purest form, are simply an outward representation of the gifts that are the most lasting: the gifts of time, attention, thought, caring, peace of mind, true friendship, acceptance, patience, tolerance, laughter, joy, freedom of expression, companionship, insight, understanding, compassion.

Sometimes what is really important in life becomes obscured by outer concerns. These have a tendency to make us feel poor and wanting when we are not and to pull our attention to focus on the attainment of symbols of a rich existence, which can ultimately leave us destitute if we lack perspective and balance.

Money and possessions are not in themselves important. Only what they represent has meaning. Note also that power, recognition, reputation, influence, control, and manipulation are not included on the list of lasting gifts. Our real life exists elsewhere, for if those inner gifts are ignored or lacking the rest are empty icons that can symbolize ultimately not abundance, but lack. You are fortunate to be both rich and generous with gifts that have real value.

Beyond Behavior

Separating people from their actions can be one of the most difficult things to do. Separating ourselves from our actions can be equally difficult, but it's something we instinctively know is possible.

If you have ever said to yourself, "Why did I do that? That wasn't *ME!*" you were right. Obviously, some types of behavior are not worthy of respect, but the individual beneath the behavior is not only worthy but entitled to it. We are all "works in progress" with an inner beauty that exists beyond behavior.

When we choose words and actions consistent with our vision of who we are beyond our behavior, regardless of what someone else says or does, we begin to close the gap between our inner reality: who we are and our outer reality: what we do. We have that power.

When we react to someone's negative behavior, we are giving that behavior control over us. One popular form of personal deception is to try to "rise above" the negative behavior. We behave in a way that we think is noble or superior or believe we are trying to use positive energy to get someone else to change. When we react in this way, it's like saying "Let the games begin."

To paraphrase a quote from the last episode of the original *Star Wars* trilogy: "Lash out in your anger and your hate and your journey to the dark side will be complete." Most of us would rather not complete that kind of journey but sometimes feel as if we cannot help ourselves.

The good news is that we can, by using the power of respect. When we split the word *respect* into syllables it becomes **RESPECT**. In other words **LOOK AGAIN**, beyond behavior, to acknowledge the inner beauty that exists within us all.

Life in the Biosphere

We hear the expression *culture* applied to corporate and community environments so often. I've used the term myself. Quite frankly, it just doesn't resonate for me. When I think of a culture, I think of a dish in a controlled laboratory growing something that was introduced into a sterile environment I think of bacteria. That may seem rather goofy, but that is the image that comes to mind. Even when we speak of a culture in human terms, we speak of customs, issues, and practices that determine and control the growth and behavior of the members.

When it comes to environments in which people live and work, try thinking of creating not a culture but a *biosphere*. By definition, the biosphere is the part of the earth's crust that supports life.

Part of treating others with dignity and respect means allowing them to *BE*, without being judged or expected to live up to someone else's idea of what they should be. This is not to say that groups that interact with one another, whether large or small, should not have laws or rules of conduct. This is a deeper matter than that and perhaps is the real meaning of *diversity*.

Being treated with dignity and respect honors the unique potential that is in each of us, allows it to flourish by creating a positive atmosphere that supports life and growth. Whether in our homes, our communities, our schools, or in our workplaces, the concept of a biosphere has to do with subscribing to an ethic that goes beyond culture. It promotes

individuality, creativity, imagination, inspiration, respect understanding, awareness, and above all—peace.

Being treated with dignity and respect honors the unique potential that is in each of us. It promotes individuality, creativity, imagination, inspiration, respect, understanding, awareness, and above all—peace.

Seven Points to Ponder

1. “Failure is an event, not a person.”—Zig Ziglar

To me this means that although it’s possible to experience failure as a temporary event in life, it’s not possible for any of us to be a failure.

2. “Live in the present.”

It seems that many of us live more in the past and the future than in the present. When we allow what has happened or what we hope will happen to distract us from the present we fragment ourselves and lose both concentration and focus.

3. “The harder you try, the harder things get.”

This may sound silly, but have you ever heard of a couple who tried for years to have a child and couldn’t? Then when they’d given up and adopted, suddenly they conceived a child of their own. This is an example of what happens to all of us in many different ways. We try too hard and actually block our good from coming to us.

4. Develop “Gattitude” (a “gratitude attitude”).

This can seem hard during those times when we feel that our dreams have been shattered, but we are *ALWAYS* in control of what our response is to whatever comes into our experience.

5. “No masterpiece was ever created by a lazy artist.”—Eleanor Thompson

This is a quote from a teacher I had years ago. She was a very good painter, but more than that she loved her art

She couldn't keep her hands off it. She even created abstract designs on her lawn with creeping plants. Love your inner music—whatever is your gift and your passion. You can never turn your back on it.

6. "Figure out what you really want."

Not the results of what we want but the essence of what it is. Then, regardless of what direction we take, we know where we're ultimately headed.

7. "Everything you need to know already exists inside of you."

Learning and discovery is simply a process of recognition or waking up.

Remember Who You Are

Years ago I was chatting with a group of high school seniors about to graduate. They were discussing their plans, their dreams. When I asked them what they felt might be the greatest challenge they would face in life, they fell silent and thoughtful. Finally one of them said, “My greatest challenge will be to be myself.”

This is the beginning of wisdom: determining who we believe ourselves to be and holding to that standard regardless of what life sends our way; keeping our personal inner power intact.

So often we allow ourselves to be defined by the circumstances of our lives or the duties and roles we perform. We may gauge our success or failure not by an inner standard, but by how we are viewed from without which is an incomplete and flawed perspective.

Sometimes we forget to take the time to define ourselves in terms of the inner qualities we value. Some fortunate people remember to do this every morning as they wake up. They remind themselves of their unique qualities, the wonder of being an individual, and the unlimited possibilities the new day holds. This sets the tone for the day and is a great preamble to the planning exercises that so many success coaches recommend.

At this point we can then more readily follow Emerson’s recommendation to not engage in any activity that is not a reflection of who we are within. In order to do this we must remember who we truly are.

The Accidental Mentor

Many years ago, I received a phone call at my office. The young male voice on the other end of the line said, “You probably won’t remember me, but I worked part-time for you five years ago. I’ve been trying to find you.” I had changed jobs during that time.

He went on. “I am about to be awarded my Ph.D. in psychology. And I wanted you to know that you are the reason.”

Back in those days, I worked for a large medical center and was a community advisor for the school of health related professions for a local university I routinely referred college students for part-time positions. It was a great way to give them practical experience and a real world view of their chosen fields. I assumed that this student had been inspired by his experience to continue on to the doctoral level. I congratulated him and said I was glad the experience at the medical center had been so meaningful to him.

But he said, “The work experience was good. But that’s not the reason I’m calling you. The day you interviewed me, you said something to me that stayed with me. You told me that you expected 100 percent of my focus and attention during the few hours a week that I was there.”

He continued, “You said that you didn’t care what I did when I wasn’t there. But that by accepting this position I was making a commitment and if I didn’t put all of myself into it, I was short-changing what I was doing and wasting my time. I

never forgot that and decided to apply it to everything I did. Because of that, I was able to get my Ph.D. Thank you!”

I didn't remember saying those words to that student, but I must have. I could just as easily not have said them or said something that might have discouraged him. I had no awareness of the potential impact of a few words.

It's YOURS!

Baseball season once again. My son plays. He's a catcher, designated hitter, sometimes pitcher. Some of the kids look fully mature, others are still waiting for their growth spurt. There's a lot of diversity out on the middle school and high school ballfields.

Lots of diversity in the stands, too. Parents perched on metal bleachers in the unrelenting sun, some hatless, some in shorts, some in business attire or work clothes. Some are chatting among themselves, some are intently watching every move of every player on the field. Others watch only when their "own" is up to bat.

There are parents who contest the umpire's decisions, spectators who try to coach from the stands, the ubiquitous parent who knows every player by his first name, volunteers from the booster club working the snack bar. Hardly the place to hear a spontaneous motivational speaker, yet it happened.

The batter had swung and missed twice. Then a voice rang out from the stands. It was someone else's dad who called to the batter by name. He called out clearly, "Quit watching the short-stop. Keep your eye on the ball! Watch it leave his hand!" And then he yelled with so much faith and conviction in his voice that everyone could believe it: "IT'S YOURS!"

There was a chilling silence, although it had to be close to 90 degrees outside. Then a resounding crack as the bat connected. A beautiful hit. The batter ran to second base.

We all step up to the plate countless times during our days on the diamonds of our lives. We are sometimes distracted by

short-stops who appear in countless disguises rather than focusing on the goal we have in mind. But even if we swing twice and miss, we're still up to bat. We can call ourselves by name, remind ourselves to keep our eye on what's important and say to ourselves with faith and conviction: IT'S YOURS!

Closing the Door on “FUD”

“I love mankind, but there are some people I just can’t stand.”

Most of us are a study in contrast, a paradox of inconsistent views. We can range from extreme kindness to coldness and indifference. Why?

I guess it’s because none of us is perfect. We fall short of our own values and lose our perspective when we are attacked by something a friend of mine refers to as FUD. We become reactive rather than responsive.

FUD—Fear, Uncertainty, Doubt.

Some advertisers and sales reps have used FUD as a marketing strategy for years. They continue to use it because it works. One glaring example is a recent commercial that shows a horde of barbarians chasing a couple in a car as they are discussing getting a credit card.

FUD uses what-ifs and innuendos and we obligingly pick them up and let our imaginations run wild with them.

Mobbers use FUD to influence others, to form the mob that will isolate, discredit, humiliate, and intimidate the target. FUD creates paranoia in the targeted person.

When FUD strikes, our behavior changes and we become inconsistent.

FUD destroys trust in relationships.

FUD adversely affects our ability to communicate and to transfer information to new situations.

FUD causes us to question what we can accomplish.

FUD stops us from being all that we can be. It sabotages our hopes, dreams, and desires. It corrupts our faith.

Sometimes those closest to us unintentionally participate in “FUD production” with admonitions to “be realistic” or asking us to explain or justify what we know to be true for us.

FUD knocks at the door of our minds and announces itself. We have the option of not letting it in. But often we can’t resist opening the door a crack just to peek at it. At that point it forces its way in, or at the very least plants a seed that quietly starts to grow.

If someone knocked at your door and said, “Let us in. We’re going to mess up your home, take your most precious possessions, hurt your loved ones, and make you ill,” would you open the door? Of course not! Yet when we open our minds to FUD, that’s exactly what we’re doing.

I have a goofy sort of exercise that I do to dismiss FUD when it sneaks in from time to time. When FUD starts intruding, I let it all the way in, rather than trying to push it away while it pushes back with equal force, which can be both distracting and exhausting.

Then I yell aloud, “Get out of here!” and visualize a door slamming shut. Then I take a deep breath and strongly exhale. Whew! The FUD just disappears! For obvious reasons, I do this in private.

Whether you try my method or come up with something else to dismiss FUD from your day, it is well worth the effort. Closing the door on FUD frees us to go on with the important work of being all we were intended to be, which is far more than we can possibly imagine.

When Work Is Play

Katherine Kuhlman once said, “To love what you do and feel that it matters, how could anything be more fun?”

It was the first day of kindergarten. The mother, who was a teacher, was excited for her son and could hardly wait to hear about his first day “Do I have to go back?” he asked.

“Didn’t you have fun?”

“No, Mom, I’d rather play outside.”

Every year after that the conversation repeated itself. Nothing really caught his attention in school. His grades were mediocre. One day his mother asked him what he thought he might want to do when he grew up.

“All I like to do is play outside, Mom. When I grow up, I want to play.”

Did this mother tell her son that he needed to do better in school so he could go to college? No. Did she try to convince him that if he just played all the time he’d never amount to anything? Absolutely not.

These smart parents allowed their son to be himself. They knew instinctively about dignity and respect no exceptions. When he finally graduated, got a job in another state, and left home, they stood smiling, waving goodbye, with complete confidence in his success potential.

Today he is a guide for backwoods fishing and hunting trips. He enjoys a brisk business. He has lots of repeat customers who pay him well, tip him handsomely, and appreciate his knowledge, enthusiasm, attitude, and excellent work. He has

fulfilled his childhood dream of growing up and playing outside.

So often we wind up doing things we don't really enjoy so that we can meet someone else's expectations of what constitutes success. Recently I was chatting with someone who said that they respected people with money, because money is power. To them, this defined the word *success*. However, these same people would tell you that if given a choice, they would want a happy life for their children most of all.

If we can get up in the morning, anxious and excited to get to work because we love what we do and feel that it matters, would we ever consider doing anything else? Most people put happiness at the top of the wish list, yet rarely take the time to create a personal definition of what that would look like, sound like, or feel like.

Being who we are and doing what we love is not always easy. It takes courage. Years later the fishing guide's mother asked him if he had as much confidence and assurance when he left home that day as his parents had in him. He replied, "No, Mom, I was scared to death!"

It is worthwhile to take a few minutes to ask ourselves a few questions. What do we love to do most of all? If we could do anything in the whole world, without restrictions, what would it be? Some people ask themselves these questions at fifteen, others at fifty, and some never ask them at all.

Successful people usually are doing what they love. They have found their inner music. They play it, sing it, and live it. They have focus, energy, and enthusiasm. They have blurred the line between work and play.

Just Take It!

There was an older woman who was invited regularly to my aunt's home for holidays. The family included her and took time to try to select gifts they thought she would enjoy. No matter what they gave her for a gift, she would whine or say something like, "What am I going to do with this?" Or, "I don't need this." Finally, in frustration, my aunt resorted to a generic gift of a box of candy and a five-dollar bill. The family gave up trying to do something to express personal appreciation.

Most people want to be appreciated. Surveyed employees state that a lack of appreciation and being taken for granted are two big reasons for low morale, lack of motivation, and looking for a "better opportunity." People in unsatisfactory relationships of all kinds often point to similar causes for some of their difficulties.

Yet accepting compliments and expressions of appreciation can be really difficult for some of us. We don't know quite what to do with ourselves, what to say, or can feel uncomfortable. This results in responses such as the following:

"Oh, this old thing?"

"You're just saying that."

"You must want something." (*Chuckle.*)

"I'm just my job."

Responses like these are like throwing a bucket of ice water on the person. This is what we're really saying when we respond to expressions of appreciation in this way:

"Your perspective is flawed."

“Your opinion is worthless.”

“You’re a liar.”

“You’re wasting my time.”

Respect is an exercise in communication, a two-way positive connection. When someone expresses honest appreciation, an appropriate and respectful response is a smile and a thank-you. The person has offered a gift. Take it!

Personal Heroes

A few years ago someone asked me who my personal heroes were. Honestly, I had never really thought about it until then. The question compelled me to do so. Some people immediately came to mind: Mother Teresa, Albert Schweitzer, my own parents. As time went on, I began watching and thinking more about who my personal heroes were. And I found that the list began to expand, or perhaps I simply became more aware of it.

We can gain insight into ourselves when we determine who our personal heroes are. There is a standard definition to the word *hero*. But our personal definitions are more important. We determine who makes the cut, who qualifies to be a hero in our own lives. When we name our heroes, we become more aware of what we value most. To some of us it may be a surprise, to others an affirmation.

A hero is someone who inspires us.

A hero possesses qualities that we admire.

A hero is a role model.

A hero is someone who embodies our values.

A hero's positive actions may exceed normal human expectations.

Being a hero isn't a choice, but a level we sometimes attain through the choices we make. Living heroically has little to do with fame, power, or leadership, although some of our national and global heroes have attained some or all of these. Heroes are rarely aware of the fact that they are heroes.

This last statement is an important point. Heroes are people like you and me. We are not perfect. We are human. But from

time to time we all take on heroic status to someone else, someone we may or may not know, someone who has heard our words, watched our actions, felt our intent learned from us. Some have taken action from our example. Some have taken courage. Some have been uplifted. And most of the time we never realize that we had such an impact on another life.

When we look around us we find many heroes. They are everywhere. Some are ever present in our lives, and others may enter for a short time and move on. They may be quiet, unaware heroes, people living their lives with courage, being true to their values and themselves and setting positive examples. When we take time to name and to acknowledge the heroes in our lives we give ourselves a great gift. We reaffirm the strength of those same qualities within us and refocus on what we value most.

Illusions

One of my all-time favorite movies is *The Gods Must Be Crazy*. During one segment of the story, one of the main characters is traveling a rolling dirt road and encounters fence-like gates blocking the way. He has to stop his vehicle, get out, open the gate, drive through, stop again, and then close the gate before continuing on.

To complicate matters, the vehicle's engine has to keep running or it can't be started again, and the hand brake doesn't work. At one point he miscalculates and stops about six inches too close to the gate and it can't clear the vehicle when he tries to open it. At another, he has to abandon the gate and run to rev up the engine so it doesn't stall. At still another, the vehicle is on an incline and begins to roll backward and he has to run and find a rock to block the wheel.

In each case he meets frustration with ingenuity and persistence. After many more mishaps, one of which includes falling flat on his face in a muddy stream while trying to push the vehicle, which became stuck in the mud while fording it, he finally reaches his destination.

We all have had days that seem to go that way. Yet sometimes obstacles that seem to tax our resourcefulness or patience wind up being more illusion than reality. When this happens, not only do we waste time and energy, we also can wind up feeling pretty silly at our misinterpretation.

Recently I was heading down one of the many gravel roads in Iowa. It was a beautiful October morning. The fields were pure gold in the sunlight and the air was clear and fresh. There

is something different about the autumn light that casts longer shadows and creates striking contrasts. It was both breathtaking and mesmerizing.

The road was not new to me, I've traveled it many times. It is a rolling two-lane road, with several one-lane bridges across small streams between the farms. This particular morning, however, I noticed something new as I approached one of the bridges. It looked like a gate was partially blocking the road ahead. It reminded me immediately of the preceding story, and I began to adjust my speed, wondering if I would be able to drive around the gate without stopping my car or if I would have to stop and move it to continue on.

I wondered if the gate was new or if I'd just never noticed it before. The bridge I was approaching was old, with metal lattice-work that rose up on either side to keep vehicles from sliding off into the stream. It was perplexing to think that someone had placed this gate in what had always been a clear path.

As I got closer to the bridge, I realized that there was no gate at all. What I was seeing was the long shadow of one side of the bridge cast across the road by the brilliant morning sun. The gate was simply an illusion created by my own interpretation of what I was seeing, based on previous information that I had in a mental file.

Each situation we encounter is a fresh and new experience. But we always look for points of reference to help us interpret what we are encountering. We draw conclusions from those points of reference and proceed on the basis of those conclusions. Often we don't look closely enough at the experience to really interpret correctly. We create illusions. Sometimes we base important decisions on such illusions. A friend once said that doing this was making a decision "based on nothing."

Sometimes quick, reactive decisions are important for our survival. But more often we have the time to look again beyond our first impression, past the initial points of reference, and see people and situations in the light of truth. When we take the time to do this, we often find that our path is clearer

than we first thought it was, and our encounters become more meaningful and fulfilling.

Looking again, re-specting people and situations continually, creates new points of reference, deepens our insight and expands our awareness.

Listen

A young boy was out playing near a stream and caught a crayfish. He carefully took it home, set it up in a container with water and food, and kept it in his room. He gave the little animal a name. One afternoon the boy's mother overheard him talking to it. He was sharing his troubles, his thoughts and feelings, with an openness she had never heard before.

Having someone to really listen helps us externalize our thoughts and feelings. It helps us clarify our viewpoints. It creates a sense of unqualified acceptance. It allows us to clear the air, forgive ourselves, and put situations to rest so that we can move forward.

True listening is a great gift that we can give each other. It costs nothing but a few minutes of our time. It can be difficult because it requires that we not form opinions, make judgments, or think about other situations that come to mind. The hardest part of all is that it requires that we remain focused on the other person and not ourselves. It creates a sense of trust.

During one scene of the 1952 screenplay adaptation of *The Importance of Being Earnest* a character has just finished singing while playing the piano. He enters the room and asks another character if he heard what he was singing. The person replies, "I didn't think it polite to listen, Sir."

The singer responds, "I'm sorry for that, for your sake. I don't sing in tune. Anyone can sing in tune. But I sing with wonderful feeling." We miss a great opportunity when we don't take the time to listen.

The listener is rewarded with insight and expanded awareness. Often, when we listen, we do relate to someone else's thoughts and feelings and sometimes the other person's view helps us clarify feelings of our own.

A cartoon shows two scenes—one is of someone sitting at a bar saying to the bartender, "Thanks, Joe, for being my shrink." The other is of someone in a psychologist's office saying, "Thanks, Doc, for being my bartender."

Both people are really saying thank you to someone for listening. In today's world so often there is no one simply to listen. To listen without questioning. To listen without passing judgment. To listen without qualifying or quantifying our thoughts and statements. To be truly present. True listening is the language of acceptance, an exercise in dignity and respect.

Head Coach

Long ago I wrote a poem during football season likening our inner selves to positions on a football team. Sometimes we play quarterback, think, and strategize. Sometimes we're the tight end, grab an idea out of the air, gain yardage or run it all the way in. Sometimes we block. Sometimes we have to punt, wait, and start over while trying not to lose ground. Sometimes we feel as though some of our players have defected and joined the opposing team.

Our good friends are the fans in the stands and on the sidelines, stomping and cheering us on, bringing us water and oranges. Sometimes they're kind enough to carry us off the field when we get the wind knocked out of us or can't crawl off on our own.

Sometimes we need a time-out to regroup and figure out what to do next. Sometimes we put in the second string and see what it can do.

When beginning a new job, a new relationship, or a new phase of life, we may feel at times that the team is comprised of a bunch of freshman, learning to perform together and rely on one another, learning to read the signs and respond to new situations. We can get frustrated and give up or continue on and persevere, knowing that we have a track record to be proud of and that things will eventually come together.

All of these positions are roles that we find ourselves playing on a daily basis depending upon the needs of the situations in which we find ourselves. And when we think that the whole team is comprised of us, we can feel pretty

fragmented and allow ourselves to get worn down. We'll play back the inner tapes of instant replays and critique ourselves, sometimes too much.

There is one position, however, that we always hold regardless of the playing field. The most important position of all—that of the head coach. That's the part of us we connect with when we begin our day, the part of us that we access at halftime for encouragement and perspective, the part of us that is the "observer." Sometimes we get so caught up in the process of what we are doing that we lose sight of the process itself. We can miss the larger picture, the insight and awareness of how all of the components of who we are make the whole and how it is unfolding in a positive direction.

Keeping connected to that head-coach component can be difficult at times, but it is surely worth it. It keeps our perspective balanced and helps prevent us from getting caught up in obsessing over individual performances. That part of us knows without question that each time we take to the field to face life head-on, it is a fresh and new experience. It is not dependent on the success or failure of what has come before, but stands on its own, an opportunity to fulfill our potential and to position us for our next gain.

My Job Is...

A mother and her teenage daughter were having a discussion during which the mother confessed that although she loved her daughter dearly, there were times when she drove her crazy. The daughter broke into a big grin and said, "I'm a teenager, Mom. That's my job!"

Some of us think of a job as an obligation, but actually it is a role that we accept and upon which we decide to act. One statement that is often referred to with frustration is someone refusing to do something by saying, "That's not my job!" Another is minimizing or depersonalizing an effort by saying, "I'm just doing my job."

One day I walked into an office for an appointment. The room was filled with desks, people working, but there was no real way for me to identify each person's function. I didn't know where I was going from there nor whom to ask for directions, and of course I was reluctant to disturb someone needlessly.

Then I noticed a small sign on every single desk. The sign said, "My job is to help you."

I knew then that I could approach anyone in the room. When I did so, I was met not with annoyance but a smile and assistance. In that work environment random acts of kindness were part of the job description. I was impressed.

Suppose everyone went around with a name tag that said, "Hello, my name is——. My job is to help you." Suppose we went around wearing these 24/7. We would be ready to help anyone because it was our job. We would be ready to ease

someone's confusion, give information, extend a hand without question or pause. We would know that everyone we met was ready to do the same. Imagine the impact that would have on all the situations in which we find ourselves.

This is a job that anyone can do. It requires no prerequisite skill other than the ability to think, respond, and pay attention to what is going on around us.

It can be part of our job descriptions as human beings interacting with other human beings on a planet that continues to contract because of our ability to communicate farther and faster than ever before. All it requires is that we accept the role and act upon it. Like any other job, the more one practices it, the more proficient one becomes, until the action is an automatic response and the attitude becomes part of our being.

Got Gattitude?

All of us at times can get so caught up in issues, individual situations, and our own feelings that we can lose sight of the present moment and the many gifts it holds. Taking things for granted is simply a matter of not paying attention or being distracted.

Iroquois elder Tom Porter once wrote: “We rarely ever ask for anything, because we don’t have to. Everything’s already here. The world is right here with us. All we have to do is say thank you. The Iroquois people’s prayer is mostly Thank you, thank you, thank you...’ If you say thank you once in a while, then those things that gave you your gifts, be it the earth, be it the sun, or thunder...well, then probably tomorrow they’ll be happy to come back.”

There has been a lot of discussion in recent years about the benefits of having a “gratitude attitude.” The following is one way to do it. My own made-up word for it is “gattitude.”

A way we can keep in touch and avoid taking things for granted is to start saying thank you for things we either simply notice or view as positive coincidence. For example, when getting up in the morning, glancing out the window and seeing a beautiful sunrise, say aloud thank you. When finding a good parking spot in a crowded lot, say thank you. Be sure that the words are audible, even if only whispered.

This practice causes us to notice and momentarily reflect on something positive. We may experience a fleeting smile or a moment when we feel more relaxed. Since it feels good, it inspires us to look for a few more things for which to say thank

you. It begins to snowball. We then start to notice kind acts or comments that we may have taken for granted in the past. We may pleasantly surprise a few people by noticing and saying thank you. We start looking for positive elements in negative situations, and because we look for them, we invariably find them. We begin to recreate our world by recreating our perspective of it. Every day becomes one of thanksgiving filled with brief, private celebrations.

“If you say Thank you, once in a while, then those things that gave you your gifts, be it the earth, be it the sun, or thunder... well, then probably tomorrow they’ll be happy to come back.”

Feet, Don't Fail Me Now!

When I was a teenager, my friends and I enjoyed comedy routines. One I especially remember was about the mind and the body being out of synch, particularly when the fight or flight response is triggered. When we are confronted with a real threat of bodily harm, the fear mechanism is triggered and lots of adrenaline starts flowing. We instinctively take off running for safety. But a conflict arises that slows us down.

Our bodies go forward, but our heads are still looking back at what threatened us. And our bodies are trying to get our attention. In essence, “Hey, quit looking back there. Watch out for the stuff we’re about to run into!”

Whether we’re running away from something or toward something, we all have a tendency to look back—to see what we’re leaving, to reflect on what happened, or to find out if what triggered a panic response has its hot breath on our heels. Try traveling from point A to point B sometime with your head turned, looking behind you. We lose our balance, veer off course, miss seeing potential hazards, slow our pace. We not only lose sight of where we’re going, but also miss what is right in front of us. Looking back can be hazardous to a healthy present experience.

I used to go rock climbing. One of the secrets to making it up the face of a cliff is not to look down while you’re climbing up. Wait until you get to the top and are safe and resting to look back at what you overcame. One morning I was climbing with a group of friends. I was making good progress, the ropes were secure, and I was finding good hand—and toeholds,

feeling stable, and efficiently scouting my next move when I made the mistake of looking down. My body froze. I literally couldn't move. I had never experienced anything like it. All the shouted encouragement from above and my own strength of will were useless. I had lost my focus by looking back.

It took a lot longer to regain my focus and start moving again than the instant it took to lose it. For a while it seemed to me as if I would be superglued to that spot on the cliff for all time. I later referred to that experience in one of my poems, which included the following lines:

All strength of will yields nothing
When focusing on the
wrong thing.

Stopping to reflect on situations and circumstances in our lives to sort them out or celebrate positives is a good thing to do. It is an important exercise in insight and awareness and is necessary for growth. Becoming still and silent is essential for us to reconnect with our inner truth and to regain perspective. When we do this, however, we do have to stop and consciously change our focus.

There is a time to look back and reflect and a time for action. When we mix the two together, we wind up with a muddled present experience that yields nothing of clarity. We find ourselves running around in circles, making no progress, or we experience inertia and can't seem to get off dead center. *Dead center* itself refers to what that state feels like, lifeless.

Maintaining control of our focus is what makes the climb easy, the run effective, and keeps the direction of our feet (intent) aligned with the mind (focus). They won't fail us as long as we "focus on the right thing," on where we are and where we're going, re-specting our present, visioning our future.

Anger Is a Secondary Emotion

A couple was doing some weekend repair work around the house when the husband accidentally whacked his thumb with a hammer. His concerned wife rushed over to him. "Are you OK?"

"I'm fine!" he bellowed at her, with a furious expression on his face.

"Well, excuse me for caring," she replied, offended.

Anger is a secondary emotion. It is triggered by hurt, pain, fear, sadness, humiliation, frustration, or a similar emotion. These emotions usually leave us feeling vulnerable or powerless, so the strong, powerful emotion of anger rises to protect that vulnerability. It never exists independently or without a reason, although while we are experiencing it, we may act in an unreasonable way.

Anger can throw us into a temporary state of crisis. Some people may appear cold and distant when they are angry, but there is nothing cold about it. When we experience a crisis certain chemical changes occur in our bodies. We're all familiar with the rush of adrenaline triggered by emotions. Other biochemical changes occur as well, causing measurable physical reactions. Our pupils dilate, blood pressure goes up, and respiration increases. We may talk louder and faster than usual.

These biochemical and physical changes then cause other skills to diminish. Our ability to hear and understand what is being said to us, our ability to communicate clearly, as well as our compromising skills are all reduced. The way we use

language changes. Usually we just want to be left alone for a few minutes. This is clearly not a time to engage in meaningful discussion and make important decisions. If we try to do so, often we find that the results are ineffective, inappropriate, or regretted once the crisis is past. And sometimes these efforts only serve to trigger another crisis in ourselves as well as those around us.

Sometimes, to avoid these changes being recognized or to avoid regrettable communication or actions, we become silent and withdraw. The results of this can be positive if we are able to make our peace with what triggered our anger or use it as an opportunity to regain our composure. Unfortunately, some use this process to calm down enough to plan retaliation. Although the crisis has passed, the anger has not. It becomes submerged and may result in very negative consequences.

Anger directed inward can make us physically ill. Anger directed outward can damage the well-being of others as well as our relationships. There are a number of courses that teach people anger management so that they can learn to deal with anger without destructive consequences to themselves or others. These are great.

Equally important, though, is for someone else to recognize and acknowledge what caused the anger in the first place. That feeling of powerlessness and vulnerability causes someone to fear being hurt further or in some other way. If the underlying emotion is identified and honored, the anger has a chance to dissipate, the crisis passes. Meaningful communication can then occur if there is trust. We can only attempt this if we remember to not take someone's anger personally and react with equal anger or resentment.

Sometimes anger directed at us is simply a matter of our being at the wrong place at the wrong time. It has more to do with what we represent to the person than who we really are. We can change that representation by responding to the underlying cause of the anger rather than the anger itself and by offering what support we can.

A couple was doing some weekend repair work around the house when the husband accidentally whacked his thumb with

a hammer. His concerned wife rushed over to him. “Are you OK?”

“I’m fine!” he bellowed at her, with a furious expression on his face.

“That must really hurt. I’ll go get some ice to put on it.”

Mended Heart

Many of us at some point in our lives have suffered from what some people refer to as a broken heart. This of course is not referring to our physical heart but an emotional condition that can affect our physical well-being as well other aspects of our lives. Even though we are not referring to a physical break, we often treat a broken heart the way we would a broken arm. We put it in a cast, a thick protective coating that nothing can penetrate. It is immobilized for an appropriate amount of time so that healing has a chance to occur. It is important not to disturb it to avoid further trauma.

If you ever have broken your arm, you know what it looks like when the cast is removed. It looks thinner, sometimes almost shriveled. It is covered with dead, discolored skin that has a pretty foul odor. It is weak from lack of use. In some cases, therapy may be necessary to restore full mobility. And for a number of years afterward, the location of the break, though healed, may occasionally ache.

When we have a broken bone, we are rushed to assistance so that further complications do not result. If the break is left untreated, we might be left with mild to severe disability that can be more difficult to correct later. Depending upon the type and severity of the break, bone fragments may damage surrounding tissue, cause bleeding, and other types of internal trauma that might lead to more serious conditions.

At no time are we told to “just get over it.” We are given pain medication if necessary and are treated with some kind of accommodation to help us adapt to our daily lives until the

bone is fully healed. The people in our lives treat us with extra caring and consideration.

You don't feel it necessary to hide the fact that your arm is broken. You know how long the cast should remain in place before removing it. The rate of healing can be checked by radiology to make sure the cast isn't removed too soon. There is a specific treatment protocol, and you are given instructions to follow. If the circumstances surrounding what caused the break result in anxiety, it is acknowledged as real.

Generally, one doesn't die from a broken arm. A broken arm doesn't feel humiliated, embarrassed, lost or betrayed. There are some people, however, who have died from the results of being brokenhearted. Some felt they could not live with the pain and ended it themselves. Others succumbed to physical illnesses that developed through complications caused by the unrelenting stress of grief and an inability or unwillingness to forgive. Some are walking around with disabilities of varying degrees as a result of the same factors. These conditions are not always obvious and sometimes deliberately hidden.

A broken heart can be mended if it is acknowledged as a real injury and not brushed off as something that will take care of itself in time if left alone. Those of us who have mended hearts have often had to develop our own treatment protocols, some more effective than others. And afterward, like a broken bone that has healed, there is always some residual evidence of the trauma. Even if what was broken ends up being stronger than it was before.

Anyone who has suffered from a "broken heart" will tell you that they would rather have a broken arm. It hurts less, heals faster, and you get more help with it.

Just As Good

A good friend of mine has the ability to make friends easily and most people seem to really like her. She feels comfortable with and likes herself, is accepting and compassionate, and most of the time her eyes just sparkle. I've always admired those qualities in her, so I decided to ask her if she had just been born like that or if it was something she had to learn.

"I guess it was because of my father," she replied. "He was a heavy drinker, and sometimes our house was like a war zone. When that happened, I went over to my grandmother's house to get away from it. He could get pretty mean when he was drinking. But despite that he was always proud of me and told me so. He also told me something over and over. He would say, "Remember this. You're no better than anyone else. But you're just as good!"

Her father's statement seems to me one of the simplest crash courses in self-esteem and human relations I've ever heard. And if taken to heart, it can be incredibly effective.

Think about each part of his statement.

"Remember this." Keep this in your mind always. Bring it into every experience you have and to every encounter with another person. Believe it.

"You're no better than anyone else." That means any other human being without exception. You are not superior. Don't compare yourself to anyone else. Don't consider for a minute that your own beliefs, behavior, or any quality you may possess gives you the right to treat someone without dignity

and respect. You have no right to degrade or ridicule another person. You are no better than anyone else.

“But you’re just as good!” Don’t ever put yourself down. There is no reason to do so. It’s OK to stand up for yourself. You’re not perfect but you are on equal footing with the rest of humanity, without exception. You are worthy and entitled to be treated with dignity and respect. You are free to appreciate others and yourself without comparison or value judgments. You are just as good as the person you most admire!

No wonder my friend’s eyes sparkle. This simple philosophy relieves her of a tremendous amount of pressure that many others endure. It sets her free to explore the world around her, and she surely does. I’ve rarely seen anyone so eager to experience new things, meet new people, listen openly to the opinions of others, and extend herself to help. She is both interested and interesting.

Has her life been free of heartache, challenges, and worrisome times? No.

Has anyone ever hurt her feelings? Yes.

Has she never made a mistake? Of course not.

Has she done things in her life of which she was not especially proud? You bet.

Has she ever been stressed out by work or family situations? Absolutely.

Does she ever get angry? Sure. (And watch out if she does.)

She’s as human as the rest of us. No better, but just as good.

If all of that is true, we might wonder what is so great about this simple philosophy. It’s certainly no miracle cure for the situations of life. It is a perspective, however, that has allowed her to see others with more insight. It has taught her how to own no one’s pain but her own. It has given her the freedom to forgive herself and begin again when she needed to without carrying a bag of misery along with her. She is able to allow each day to stand on its own and to know her rightful place in it is assured.

Because of this, she knows that she is worthy of and has the right to experience Joy.

No more than anyone else.

But just as much.
And so are we.

It's Not Easy Being

There's an old song called "It's Not Easy Being Green" sung by Kermit the Frog. The song starts out with Kermit stating all the reasons why being green seems to be really disappointing. It ends with a list of positives about being green, and ends with the line, "And I think it's what I want to be."

Good thing. Kermit has no choice but to be green. It's the way he was created. Kermit's problem with being green comes from looking around, seeing all the other colors, and comparing himself to them. He feels that being green is pretty boring and thinks how wonderful it would be to be red or yellow or some exciting color like that.

When I lived in Tampa, Florida, and went to school open houses I was one of the tallest mothers there, since the majority of the folks seemed to have been descendants of the pirate Jose Gasparilla or someone similar. When I moved to Iowa, the top of my head came up to the chins of a lot of the moms of Viking ancestry. I didn't change, but the environment did, along with what was "average." Comparing my height with those around me in either place and worrying about it was pointless since I couldn't change it. Sometimes being my height has been inconvenient. If I bought an "average" in slacks (up to 5' 8"), they looked like I was ready to ford a stream. If I bought "tall" (5' 11" and over), I was tripping over the excess, and since I'm someone who can't "walk and chew gum" to begin with, this was definitely not a good thing. Or as some of my Tampa friends might groan, "No es bueno." When it comes to buying clothing, it has not been easy being me. Of course, this is a

simple example. There have been many other things beyond my control that have made it “not easy being me.” Some of them much more challenging.

Toward the end of the song Kermit realizes that green is the color of spring and that it’s a friendly color, among other positives. He starts going beneath his own surface impression of “boring” green and begins to grab hold of the essence of who he really is, which has nothing at all to do with comparing himself to another. That’s when he’s able to admit that he thinks he wants to be who he is.

I imagine it wasn’t easy to be Mahatma Gandhi or Helen Keller, either. They and many others, most not so famous, went beneath the surface to discover, appreciate, and fulfill what they found within. They might just as easily have fallen into despair and focused on the apparent unfairness of some of the ways in which they were created that seemed to limit their choices in life and over which they had no control. In fact, I’m certain that they did that very thing for a while. They might have spent a lifetime comparing themselves to others in their environments, wishing they were something else, never capturing the essence of what they were intended to be and to do. It took insight and a greater awareness to get past their own versions of “being green” so that they could accomplish very personal missions that impacted many.

Whether we’re green or not quite average or something else on the surface, we are created uniquely and with intent. We all have the ability to use our insight to give ourselves the gift of greater awareness. Then that gift can be extended and cast a bit more light into the world around us, perhaps not in such a dramatic way, but in a necessary and valuable way that cannot be achieved by any other person. Each of us is a very precious, one-of-a-kind event.

Stray, Imperfect, Needy

There is a heartwarming story about some people who ran an ad for free puppies. They were described as seven adorable puppies and one very ugly puppy. All of the puppies got adopted, and every person who came wanted to adopt the ugly puppy.

Our family kitty came to us in a similar fashion. My daughter was given permission to get a cat. She had her choice of lots of adorable kittens. Also available was a three-year-old, neutered female with one eye missing. You guessed it. My daughter adopted the one-eyed female, saying that she looked like she needed someone to love her.

It is interesting that many people gravitate toward stray, imperfect or needy pets that they feel can benefit from nurturing and caring. It is equally interesting that many of these same individuals will avoid what they view as stray, imperfect, and needy specimens of our own species. The first story would have been even more heartwarming if people had lined up to adopt one very ugly child in the midst of a group of adorable candidates.

The difference is that we often define ourselves by appearances rather than our own sense of what is true, valuable, and lasting. We give lip service to what we know is valuable but cannot get past the appearance of what others have determined to be beautiful. If we adopt an imperfect pet, it only demands so much of us and our own sense of self-worth is not compromised by that selection. It's rather like the outrageous line in the movie *Liar, Liar*, when the boy asks his dad if true

beauty is really on the inside. His father replies, no, that “some ugly people just made that up.”

When it comes to people, many just cannot get past the surface. Those who have learned to look beyond appearances, to catch hold of the vision of the inner truth of others and to acknowledge that truth, have learned something we call compassion. Compassion does not mean to be solicitous to someone who appears to be stray, imperfect, or needy. It means to see that person as we see ourselves, as unique human beings with wants, hopes, needs, dreams, and desires.

Compassion opens the doorway for us to be able to really experience love. Those of us who have acknowledged our own times of feeling stray, needy, and imperfect no longer look at those as points on a continuum from one to ten, but as points of understanding. We are free to decide for ourselves what points we wish to look at and what points we can overlook. We have learned that we are not defined or confined by the view of what someone else has determined to be beautiful.

In the heartwarming puppy story, everyone who showed up expected to save a poor unfortunate puppy. They probably allowed the owners to show them which puppy was the ugly one. They reacted with sympathy, not compassion. There is a big difference.

To me, the real point of this story is never stated. It lies not in what the people were looking for but what they found, a fellow creature that didn't seem all that ugly to them and with whom they could share their homes and their love.

When we reach that point, our hearts are more than just warmed. They are opened to receive as well as give. The truth that is within us connects with the truth that we see in others. When this happens, the result is what many call a relationship.

I Wish They Knew

At a conference a couple of years ago, we did an exercise in one of the sessions called “The Fishbowl.” In this exercise, one person sat in a chair placed in the middle of a circle of other chairs. While in the center, each person revealed something about himself or herself that he or she felt others misunderstood about them. Those in the circle of chairs listened in silence.

It was an interesting and revealing experience, as many of us didn’t know each other very well, and of course we had made assumptions based upon what little information we had. Since the conference was focused on male-female issues, the facilitator asked us to limit our comments to the following topics. Men: “Something I wish women knew about me.” Women: “Something I wish men knew about me.”

Some of the responses were surprising. One successful, self-assured gentleman wished that the women in his life knew how weighed down by his responsibilities he felt at times. A professional woman wished that the men in her life could appreciate her rather than viewing her as competition.

The essay “Stray Imperfect Needy” mentioned how hard it can be for us to get past the surface. This two-dimensional vision of our fellow human beings applies to everyone, including those who appear to be anything but stray, imperfect or needy. We have a tendency to draw conclusions from appearances and base a lot of our interactions on those conclusions.

One of the strengths of the Fishbowl exercise was that the listeners were really listening. They were open and receptive to the information that the person in the center shared. Some of the participants felt reluctant at first, myself included. When we were finished, however, many of us saw each other with new eyes.

Whether we realize it or not, we are in and out of the fishbowl on a daily basis. Similar information is revealed in a variety of less formal ways by us and by those in our professional and personal lives. Often we either cannot or will not accept the insight and deeper awareness that is offered. Opening ourselves to be receptive to new information can be risky. Allowing ourselves to open enough for others to see past the image that we convey is risky, too. In both cases we may feel vulnerable.

Many of us are surprised by the conclusions that others draw about us. It can be frustrating when someone expects us to live up to an inaccurate image they have of us. It can be equally disappointing when people do not live up to the inaccurate images that we had of them. None of us are completely what we appear to be.

We are both more and less than expected. When we take time to look again at others, past the surface, and risk that deeper awareness, we may find a surprise—another unique human being who, like us, has wants, hopes, needs, dreams, and desires, and with whom we may be able to share some of our own.

Small accomplishments that are given thoughtful, timely, and true recognition in the form of honest appreciation plant the seeds for greater achievement.

Epilogue “Courage”

Courage has many faces. It always involves risk.

Courage involves putting ourselves knowingly into situations of uncertain outcome.

Courage is taking a stand for what we believe to be true.

Courage is something that compels us to act beyond our own self-interest.

Courage is something that people are told to take hold of when they experience fear.

Courage often is not easy, yet for those who are compelled by it, there is no other option.

Courage is a choice.

Courage is something we face alone, at times when there is no safety in numbers.

Courage is a thoughtful response.

Courage is triggered by the good qualities of empathy and compassion.

Putting ourselves knowingly in risky situations without purpose is not courage but foolishness. Some take risks for excitement. That is not courage. Courage is acting beyond self-interest.

The media broadcast stories of extreme courage that stir us. Our lives are full of little stories and opportunities to act with courage.

A high school freshman noticed a boy she knew enter the crowded lunchroom. The only place to sit was with a group of upperclassmen. They began teasing him while he was trying

to eat. The discomfort on his face disturbed her. She understood what he was feeling. She experienced empathy.

The freshman got up to leave and go back to class. She could have turned and walked the other way, but her empathy triggered compassion and that stopped her. Instead, she walked toward the table where the boy was being teased. She smiled and called him by name and chatted with him. Then she turned and looked at the others at the table.

“Is something wrong here?” she asked.

The others replied that they were just teasing the boy. The freshman replied, “He deserves to be treated with respect.”

“I was scared,” she said later. “I knew when I walked over there that I was taking a big chance. They were upperclassmen and the “cool kids,” and I’m just a freshman. I knew it could come back on me if I spoke up. But I just couldn’t walk away, pretend I didn’t see it, and do nothing.”

There is a quote that has been attributed to a number of authors. It reads as follows: “That best portion of a good man’s life are his little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and of love.” Often those acts involve courage.

On the surface, courage may take the form of a selfless act, but it is a powerful gift that we give ourselves.

When we act with courage as a choice consistently, it becomes a conditioned response. And something else happens as a result of that courage. We become free to become the embodiment of our values and more fully express what we know to be true. Courage is an exercise in dignity and respect that amplifies those qualities within us.

Have a Great Day, and be good to yourself. You deserve it!

Gail

Part 3

Appendix, Resources

Appendix

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Zero Tolerance Policies. ERIC Digest Number 146.

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Responding to concern over school safety, state legislatures and school boards in recent years have enacted a range of zero-tolerance policies focused on combating weapons, drugs, violence, and antisocial behavior. Results have been mixed, with some critics discounting the policies altogether. Almost all schools report having zero-tolerance policies for firearms (94 percent) and weapons other than firearms (91 percent), according to the National Center for Education Statistics (Kaufman and others, 2000). Eighty-seven percent of schools have zero-tolerance policies for alcohol, and 88 percent have policies for drugs. Most schools also have zero-tolerance policies for violence and tobacco (79 percent each). This Digest describes the origins of zero-tolerance policies, presents

evidence on their effectiveness, examines criticisms of them, and recommends strategies to make the policies more useful.

What Is Zero Tolerance?

Zero-tolerance policies are administrative rules intended to address specific problems associated with school safety and discipline. In 1994 Congress passed the Gun-Free Schools Act, which required states to legislate zero-tolerance laws or risk losing federal funds (Martin, 2000). In response, various states, counties, and districts have developed their own policies in tune with local needs. In implementing the policies, some administrators have cast a broad net treating both minor and major incidents with equal severity to “send a message” to potential violators (Skiba and Peterson, 1999).

The Gun-Free Schools Act included language allowing local review on a case-by-case basis. Some administrators have declined to exercise this discretion, believing instead that continued unwavering application of zero tolerance is necessary to deal with disruptive students (Skiba and Peterson). Sometimes even exemplary students are caught in the zero-tolerance net. For instance, during the 1997–98 school year, a teacher observed 12-year-old Adam L., an A student filing his nails with a miniature Swiss Army knife; for violating the school’s antiweapons policy, the youth received a one-year expulsion (Zirkel, 1999).

Why Were Zero-Tolerance Policies Established?

Zero-tolerance policies were enacted to combat the seemingly overwhelming increase in school violence during the 1990s. In a 1995 School Crime Victimization Survey, 12 percent of responding students knew someone who had brought a gun to school (Ashford, 2000). As the media focused on violence in schools, pressure increased on legislators to take action against weapons in schools.

Following enactment of the Gun-Free Schools Act all 50 states adopted some variation of the law. This law made Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) funds “contingent on a state’s enacting a ‘zero-tolerance’ law with the goal of producing gun-free schools” (Ashford). Some states went beyond this focus on guns and decided to apply zero tolerance to the entire breadth of possible disciplinary infractions in an effort to weed out violators and standardize discipline.

Are Zero-Tolerance Policies Fulfilling Their Purpose?

It has been almost a decade since schools first began to institute zero-tolerance policies, and more than six years since the Gun-Free Schools Act. Critics claim there has been no concerted effort to test the efficacy of interventions that target school behavior, and few studies have evaluated the effectiveness of zero-tolerance strategies (Skiba and Peterson).

The National Center for Education Statistics found that, after four years of implementation, zero-tolerance policies had little effect at previously unsafe schools; the center also reports that the current data do not demonstrate a dramatic decrease in school-based violence in recent years (Ashford). The popularity of zero-tolerance policies may have less to do with their actual effect than the image they portray of schools taking resolute measures to prevent violence. Whether the policies actually change student behavior may be less important than the reassurance it gives the school community at large (Ashford).

Some schools report positive results from their policies. In Tacoma, Washington, Henry Foss Senior High School’s School-Centered Decision Making (SCDM) team implemented in fall 1991 a zero-tolerance policy against fighting. After one year, the policy resulted in a 95 percent drop in violent behavior on campus. Moreover, the policy’s positive impact led to record-breaking freshmen enrollment; the majority of new entrants

indicated that they were attending the school primarily because of its safety (Burke and Herbert, 1996).

Similar results were found in New Jersey's Lower Camden County Regional High School District where zero tolerance contributed to a 30 percent drop in superintendent disciplinary hearings; drug-related offenses dropped by nearly one-half (Schreiner, 1996).

Why Are Zero-Tolerance Policies Criticized?

Zero-tolerance policies create long-term problems through exclusion, say critics. Consistently, school suspension was found to be a moderate to strong predictor of a student's dropping out of school (Skiba and Peterson). When students are not in school, they are on the streets and, more often than not, getting in more serious trouble than they could at school. Setting these policies in stone without any thought to the inherent ambiguities of human interaction allows only arbitrariness and exclusion and, thus, abandons the educational mission of schools, asserts Perlstein (2000).

Zero-tolerance policies have undoubtedly created legal headaches for some school administrators. By greatly increasing the number of students considered for expulsion, and by removing the flexibility previously accorded to administrators, these policies have hindered administrators' ability to address marginal incidents, says Stader (2000).

Perhaps the biggest problem with zero-tolerance policies is inconsistent application and interpretation. David Day, general counsel for four Indiana school districts, says he expects lawsuits when board members suddenly announce they are imposing a zero-tolerance policy that leaves no room for administrators' discretion or students' due-process rights (Jones, 2000).

In February 2001, the American Bar Association approved a resolution opposing "policies that have a discriminatory effect or mandate either expulsion or referral of students to juvenile or

criminal court without regard to the circumstances or nature of the offense or the student's history."

A report on the resolution noted the disproportionate number of African-American students who have been expelled (Juvenile Law Center, 2000). A weak link in the chain connecting policy to practice is that those responsible for implementation often haven't heard of, or don't clearly understand, the policy. In the absence of training on how to deal with infractions, administrative ignorance or ineptitude is largely to blame for lawsuits over disciplinary actions.

Although most mainstream students live in a "one strike you're out" environment the situation is different for special-education students. Laws governing violations by special-education students generally guarantee the student's right to due process under the Fourteenth Amendment. To expel a special-education student, a panel must be convened to determine whether the violation is related to the student's disability, in which case the school must follow due-process procedures, including an IEP meeting and subsequent hearing (Zirkel).

Special-education students are also protected by the "stay put" provision, which keeps them in their present educational environment unless a court grants a preliminary injunction declaring that the student presents a high level of danger as defined in *Honig v. Doe* (1988).

What Are the Elements of an Effective Policy?

When formulating a zero-tolerance policy, it may be useful for state officials and local school boards to attend to the following recommendations:

- Specify clear consequences for misbehavior, with consistency of application.
- Allow flexibility and consider expulsion alternatives.
- Clearly define what constitutes a weapon, a drug, or an act of misbehavior.

- Comply with state due-process laws and allow for student hearings.
- Develop the policy collaboratively with all stake-holding agencies (for example, state departments of education, juvenile justice, and health and human services).
- Learn from the experiences educators have had with zero tolerance in other states, schools, and districts.
- Integrate comprehensive health-education programs that include drug and alcohol curricula.
- Tailor the policy to local needs.
- Review the policy each year.

A sound policy allows administrators some degree of discretion in responding to infractions. The policy should allow officials to consider the special circumstances of a violation, such as the age of the offender, the ability of the offender to comprehend the policy, the intent of the offender, the effect of the transgression on other students (both those directly and indirectly involved), and, finally, the past disciplinary record of the offender (Martin). Special circumstances can be used to consider alternatives that may be more appropriate than expulsion.

By categorizing violations in accordance with their severity, administrators send a strong message that violations will not be allowed, while avoiding a “one size fits all” approach (Ashford). While setting up discretionary systems to handle policy violation may prolong the decision-making process, it will free schools from a tangle of due-process litigation and allow decisions to be made on the basis of facts so appropriate disciplinary action can be levied (Stader).

When students are suspended or expelled, they should be referred to outside counseling and, in extreme cases, to local law-enforcement agencies. By following these guidelines, administrators will not only cover their own accountability but also create excellent resources that could offer valuable second opinions into any administrative decisions being made.

A zero-tolerance policy is but one part of a broader set of policies dealing with school safety. Each school district should

also develop a crisis-management plan tailored to individual schools and their communities. Conflict-mediation programs, active recruitment of students to participate in planning, and peer mentoring may open lines of communication between students, improve the school climate, and reduce violence (Stader). This strategy has worked for schools in Wisconsin and North Carolina (Blair, 1999).

When communicating zero-tolerance policies to the public as well as to the school community, officials should focus on three points: exact definitions of punishable offenses, consequences for noncompliance, and the decision process that will be followed when offenses occur. To alleviate apprehension, administrators can stress that children are actually safer at school than anywhere else.

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Recommended Resources

Books:

Mobbing: Emotional Abuse in the American Workplace. Noa Davenport, Ruth Distler Schwartz and Gail Pursell Elliott, Civil Society Publishing, Ames, IA

Swallowed by a Snake: The Gift of the Masculine Side of Healing. Thomas Golden, Golden Healing Publishing, Gaithersburg, MD

Breaking the Silence. Linda Goldman, Brunner Routledge, NY

Bullycide: Death at Playtime, Neil Marr and Tim Field, Success Unlimited, Oxfordshire, UK

Training:

Innovations “*Training with a Can-Do Attitude*”

Dignity and Respect and Mobbing Awareness Programs

Contact: Gail Pursell Elliott

9600-388-9600

URL—[http://www.innovations-](http://www.innovations-training.com)

[training.com](http://www.innovations-training.com)

National Alliance for Safe Schools

School Violence Prevention

Contact: Peter Blauvelt, President/CSE

1-888-510-6500 Email: nass@raven-villages.net

S.A.V.E. Students Against Violence Everywhere

Student-directed violence prevention based at your school.

Contact: Dr. Pamela Riley, Executive Director

1-866-343-SAVE URL—<http://www.nationalsave.org>

Online Audio-workshops on Grief, Crisis, and Healing—
Approved for CEU's for LCSW
Presenters: Sam Keen—Rabbi Kushner—Tom Attig—Tom
Golden
URL—<http://www.griefceu.com>

Online Articles and Resources:

National Institute for the Prevention of Workplace Violence

Includes both workplace and school violence information

<http://www.workplaceviolence911.com>

Bullying Powerpoint Presentation

<http://www.cary-memorial.lib.me.us/bullyweb/powerpoint/sld001.htm>

Bully OnLine

Includes both workplace and school bullying information

<http://www.successunlimited.co.uk>

Positive Attitude Sites For Students/Teachers

<http://www.ucando.org>

<http://www.livinglifefully.com>

<http://www.motivateus.com>

About the Author



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Consultant graduate of Penn State University, postgraduate

certification work in education at the University of South Florida, member of American Mensa, Member of the American Society for Training and Development, Gail Pursell Elliott is founder and president of Innovations “Training With A Can-Do Attitude,”™ located in central Iowa.

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The mother of two teenagers, Gail has developed dignity and respect workshops and mobbing awareness programs for schools and speaks on the topic of violence prevention. Gail is coauthor of the book *Mobbing: Emotional Abuse in the American Workplace* and author of training, motivation, and inspirational materials and the weekly column “Food For Thought.”

Gail has over 20 years of professional experience in administration, education, recruitment, training, and motivation. Operating from the basic premise that “all people want and have the right to be treated with dignity and respect, no exceptions,” she travels nationally to conduct staff and supervisory training for both profit and not-for-profit organizations in the areas of interpersonal communication, motivation and morale, reward and recognition, teamwork and trust, and a see it—stop it—prevent it approach to emotional abuse in the workplace. She is a featured speaker at conferences.

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Please Understand Me II: Temperament, Character, Intelligence, David Keirse, Del Mar, CA: Prometheus Nemesis Book Co.

The Importance of Being Earnest, Screenplay adaptation of the play by Oscar Wilde, Janus Films, Presented by J.Arthur Rank Organisation, distributed by General Film Distributors, Ltd., Filmed at Pinewood Studios, England.

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