

Five Ways to Be the Change We Want to See.

Description

Imagine this scenario. Itâ??s been a rough day at work. Again. You go home and, if you are like many of us, you bring that difficult boss or problem employee with you. You vent to your spouse and friends and anyone who will listen, â??They donâ??t appreciate me,â?• or â??They donâ??t treat me fairly,â?• or â??They pick apart everything I doâ?¦thereâ??s just no pleasing them!â?•

Then, the next day you get a note from the teacher about your childâ??s less than stellar grades and conduct. When you ask him about it his response is, â??The teacher just doesnâ??t like me!â?• or â??Things arenâ??t fair.â?• The first words out of your mouth are, â??You have got to learn to get along!â?•

Do you see the connection? As a parent, itâ??s not so much what we *say* to our kids, itâ??s what we regularly *do*. They are watching how we act and learning from us. And while we may not think about it much, so are others. We need to be careful what behaviors we are modeling.

There have been a lot of complaints that we live in a world thatâ??s more tense and divisive than ever. Just turn on the TV or look at social media and itâ??s hard to deny this. Itâ??s not just a political issue, it happens at work, too. People are more inclined to dig in and argue and to label others as wrong than to listen, consider other viewpoints, and compromise. Thereâ??s a lot of self-righteousness out there. This behavior permeates all areas of life.

This really boils down to a lack of humility. There seems to be a general unwillingness on the part of many people to admit that they might be wrong. This mindset makes others uncomfortable, but the problems go a lot deeper than that. When people (especially leaders) exhibit this behavior, employees donâ??t engage. Brainstorming comes to a halt. Conversation canâ??t flow freely. The best ideas canâ??t rise to the top. Progress canâ??t be made.

Even worse, when we have to be right all the time people wonâ??t really like us. We will miss out on one of the great joys of life: meaningful human relationships. And without being willing to admit that we may not know the truth, we will never be able to learn and grow.

The first step to fixing all this is being willing to hold up the mirror and honestly ask oneself: â??Am I part of the problem?â?• This simple act can shift the world around us for the better.

A big part of being an adult means realizing that we canâ??t force other people to change their behavior. What we *can* do is change our own behavior and, often, those around us may change theirs in response. As Gandhi is reported to have said, we must be the change we want to see in the world. Consciously changing oneself can be an extremely powerful act.

A few tips:

Consider that you might be wrong (or at minimum a bit wrong). Maybe you have recently taken a strong stand on an issue at work thatâ??s causing dissent. Or you have a long-held political conviction that you wonâ??t budge on. Try approaching the issue with fresh eyes and an open mind. Is it possible to see it from a different point of view? Challenge yourself to learn new information. Read the opinions of those who you generally disagree with. Try standing in their shoes. Even if you end up sticking with your initial opinion, this exercise can help you understand where others are coming from.

Before you write or say anything, get in the habit of asking yourself four key questions. *Is it kind? Is it truthful? Is it necessary? Is it any of my business?* If the answer to any of these is no, donâ??t say it. Harsh and judgmental words rarely help any situation.

Carefully choose words and phrases that calm and de-escalate. For example: â??I may not know,â?• or â??You could be right,â?• or â??This is just my perception, but this is what I think happened.â?• This serves dual purposes: One, it encourages others to open up and engage in the conversation, and two, it reminds us that we truly donâ??t know it all. Choosing the right words can dissolve our own self-righteousness, which is a barrier to truth.

Just Listen: Weâ??ve learned how to talk and express ourselves, but along the way, weâ??ve forgotten how to listen. It sounds so obvious but itâ??s amazing how many people do this. Too often we are so busy formulating our response that we donâ??t really hear what others are saying. Learn to listen actively. Repeat back to them what you think they said. Not only will this help the other person feel heard, the act of saying their words may shift your own attitude a little.

Look for and leverage the good in the â??the other side.â?• Very often, when people are deeply polarized on an issue, there are positives to both viewpoints. The right decision is rarely black and white, or â??either/or.â?• We need to learn how to take the good aspects of both camps and meld them into a solution that creates a better reality for everyone. This is easier said than done, but itâ??s often what great leadership looks like.

Citizenship isnâ??t always formally taught these days, so we have to find ways to reinfuse it. When we model humility, open-mindedness, consideration, and grace we are teaching those around us to be better citizens.

Many people appreciate the kindness, gentleness, and loving spirit of Fred Rogers. As a society we may never return to his â??Neighborhood.â?• But as individuals we can choose to be that kind of neighbor. We can choose to be that kind of employer, employee, spouse, parent, and friend. When we do, we change the world for the better, often in ways we may never know. Itâ??s not too late to get started.

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