

ONE WEB, DIFFERENT WEAVES

Human Respect



"A little respect, a little honor, can go a long way. Sometimes it's not the broad philosophic issue of cosmic innocence versus worldly guilt, but the simple ways we communicate to one another that determine whether love or fear pervades a relationship"...

Marianne Williamson

Living our lives in stories, we all grow up with a story of who we are. When we step into the world, we become a part of the existing narratives of 'people' and 'life' of the cultural groups we identify with. In other words, we are born without a script of "how to live and how to be", but learn to label people and situations; learn to form our ideas of what is acceptable and what is not; and learn to make decisions and choices based on the messages we receive from the world we grow up in. This implies that we will face diverse worldviews and perspectives from people each day, and more importantly that we have an ability to respect others; but whether we express that respect or not will be determined by the cultural messages that we have been exposed to and the respectful ideas and practices we identify with.

HUMAN RESPECT

Human Respect is universal and implies that we honor and accept other individuals, irrespective of race, culture, sexual orientation, ability, gender, nationality, ancestry, religion, spirituality, political beliefs, socio-economic status, and language. It also means that we acknowledge the differences between individuals; we understand the reasons why not to label the differences as "bad" and we express a sense of dignity towards others, as respect is the core right of every human being.



RESPECT FOR SELF AND OTHERS

Life experiences and cultural messages will determine how we look at ourselves, how we respect ourselves, and all that will impact how we respect other human beings. As humans, we are all endowed with an ability to feel attractive, intelligent and compassionate. However, somewhere along the way, different life events and messages passed down can cause us to develop a story of ourselves that suggests a sense of not being good enough, a sense that there is something wrong with us, or lacking in us, in comparison to others. These can lead to feelings of self-hate, self-doubt, powerlessness or decreased self-respect. We may unconsciously or consciously compensate for these unhealed wounds and try to reclaim our power by putting another individual down or feeling better at the cost of another. This only perpetuates negative messages and oppressive behaviors.

Accepting our complete being, including the positive and challenging elements, is key to feeling “whole” and to raising our self-esteem and self-respect. If we can remind ourselves that we can rewrite these stories of ourselves and unlearn those negative messages, we won’t need to look outside ourselves to reclaim that lost power.

ACCEPTANCE AND COMPASSION

“In logic, no two things can occupy the same point at the same time, and in poetry that happens all the time. This is almost what poetry is for, to be able to embody contrary feelings in the same motion”.....

Donald Hall

Respecting others and ourselves begins from an internal place of compassion and acceptance. Accepting our increments of growth and recognizing that humans can be both happy and sad, both angry and tender, both nice and rude, and other such opposing ways of being, allows room to make mistakes and evolve. Acknowledging these multitudes of stories within one person can assist us in being more tolerant and flexible towards others and ourselves.

WHAT IS NOT CONSIDERED RESPECT?

“Every man is to be respected as an absolute end in himself; and it is a crime against the dignity that belongs to him as a human being, to use him as a mere means for some external purpose”...

Immanuel Kant



The philosophy of “to do no harm” is one that can help us differentiate between respectful and disrespectful practices. Behaviors or practices that seek or intend to harm others or us signify disrespect. For example, coercing another college student into using substances, poking fun at international accents, giving in to hatred, violating another person’s space and boundaries, and seeking vengeance are oppressive gestures and not signs of respect. When we acknowledge differences, we also reserve the right to adopt or reject another’s idea or behavior. Recognizing differences in values, perspectives, or life experiences in another human being does not translate into imitating those values and behaviors.

COMMUNICATION RESPECT

“People don’t get along because they fear each other. People fear each other because they don’t know each other. They don’t know each other because they have not properly communicated with each other”....

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

We may often find ourselves in situations when we say things we don’t mean; when we are unable to find the right words to express our thoughts; when we are not able to articulate our intentions clearly; or just feel emotionally overwhelmed to share our thoughts. It is important to remember that our communication style will impact whether or not another person feels respected. Emotions often intrude in our communication; and our anger or sadness might shut us down or get us to become stressed or irritable. We may sometimes need to soothe our feelings before we engage in conversations with others, and to make sure that we are communicating in a way that is congruent to us. Speaking with “I” statements when disagreeing with another, makes others feel less threatened or attacked, and results in their reacting to our statements in a less defensive manner. Overall, the key is to be mindful of our emotional state, our choice of words, our non-verbal communication (e.g. tone of voice, posture, and eye contact) and our true intentions. Challenge yourself to consider whether or not you have a hidden agenda, or whether you are seeking some personal gain when interacting with others; this will only result in you feeling a greater sense of self-empowerment and tolerance.

AN AUTHENTIC AND RESPONSIBLE JOURNEY

We live in a world that is complete with temptations at all levels, whether it is an iPod, a flat screen television, a shopping spree, attention a night at a club, and other such



selfish opportunities for personal gain. In order to connect with our own authentic story, we need to spend our energies in focusing on the next step in our own journeys. Idolizing media icons turns our lens outward into imitating other's actions and doesn't help us in making choices that are congruent to our circumstances and us.

College life presents opportunities of new freedoms and new responsibilities. The freedom to make choices of many kinds will be a consistent theme in your college experiences. Some of these choices may include, but are not limited to selection of courses, managing your money, choosing friends and/ or partners, choosing whom to vote for, managing your leisure time and how to spend your time and energy overall. Each of these choices results in an outcome and will have consequences, negative or positive. It becomes significant that you focus on making choices that are congruent to your true self and not ones that are based on the imitation of others' behavior. Each of these choices will assist you in reaching your ultimate personal or professional goals. It is important to be conscious of the decisions you make each day. Often times, we choose to do something automatically, either because everyone is doing it, because of peer pressure or because we are too busy to think about it.

As contributing members to the campus community, you are now expected to exhibit a commitment to examining the act of choice, its accountability to consequence, and the power that is exercised as a result (Compass, 2005).

CODES, VALUES, AND CONCEPTS

- ***Honor Codes are used to promote a strong sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness.*** An Honor Code empowers the individual to live responsibly. They traditionally prohibit lying, stealing, and academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty can be defined as cheating, and/or plagiarism. Academic integrity values authenticity in your contribution to the academic process. Consider this, what would be the value of your degree if you cheated your way through school? If your college was known, across the country, as a school that graduated cheaters, what would be the value of your degree upon graduation? Academic integrity protects the reputation of the institution and the value of your degree upon graduation.
- ***Judicial Codes and other Campus Policies (e.g., Drug and Alcohol and/or Nondiscrimination and Affirmative action Stand to ensure the right of every individual to be treated with respect and dignity.*** A primary goal of college is help students develop into productive and contributing members of society.



Therefore, if you are found in violation of state or federal laws, in regard to alcohol and drugs, you can be punishable by both the local and/or federal government as well as the college. This is very important to consider when making choices, understanding accountability and consequences, and the personal power that you exercise as a result.

If you recognize that you have the power to make decisions and choices that are healthy and follow the principle of 'to do no harm', you can have a successful and enriched college life. As students and human beings in general, it is our responsibility to work towards being conscious citizens, and to making respectful and authentic choices that will ultimately create stories of tolerance and acceptance in the global culture.

Anchal Khanna, M.A., M.S.

Counselor, Counseling and Psychological Services

References

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