

What I have Learned Since Kindergarten

Although I may have been taught everything I needed to know in Kindergarten, I did not LEARN everything I needed to know. Being an engineer, I also think I could have used a few more specifics. If washing your hands expands to cleaning the environment, what exactly is your definition of clean and what part of the environment needs cleaning, and what part is the dirt? Growing up is a huge process where we learn what is clean enough for which situations and what is the dirt as opposed to the nutrients, good bacteria, and grease for the skids. And in Kindergarten they don't teach the really hard part about growing up, like what do you do if your boss is in a bad mood and starts criticizing you for no reason, or understanding why your spouse is accusing you of not loving them just because you didn't get around to washing the car. So today I'm going to talk about some of the lessons I have learned that have helped me cope in difficult situations and others that have helped me better understand other people, and myself.

One of the first lessons I remember learning was during my freshman year in high school. Being a bit geeky – ok very geeky, I got picked-on in PE by the tough girls. One day a tough girl wore this great belt with pink elephants on it. So I told her that the belt was cool. Later when the other girls started to make rude remarks to me I noticed the girl with the cool belt didn't join in. Hum, was this an anomaly? Over the next week I systematically found some way to compliment each one of the tough girls. And lo and behold, I stopped getting picked on. After some analysis I think the lesson here is that if you show others that you appreciate them, their tastes, some part of them, they are more likely to treat you with respect. It creates a connection!!!

Touch is another action that creates a connection. When I was 11, my 14 year old sister and I were volunteered to help in the

Kindergarten class in Sunday School. This class had a couple of kids with major behavior issues. My sister learned that she didn't want to be around wild children. I learned something else.

I ended up holding a child in my lap for most of the first class. Once he understood that I respected him, I really believed he was a good kid, and I was going to hug him until he could get control of himself, then he finally calmed down. After that first Sunday it only took a great big hug to get him settled down. In later years I have found that a hug could not only help my kids settle down, but touch in general is a sign of support and respect that most people respond to. I have learned to notice when the situation is tense and to diffuse it with touch and acceptance. Even a light brush of a hand on an arm creates a connection.

Another lesson I learned in Sunday School was taught during the teacher training for Religious Education. The RE director was explaining that the toddler supply box has graham crackers in it for crying toddlers. She said "If you give a child a cookie the child will settle down, and decide you are an ok person." The experienced high school teacher piped up and said "Sugar works with teenagers too". I now believe that it is instinctual to feel friendly towards someone willing to feed you. When you share food with others you create a bond. Why do you think corporations are willing to buy donuts for a meeting? The bond created by food enhances teamwork, diffuses resentment, and lessens tension. There is a trust created that can make any situation better.

One of the biggest lessons I have learned is that everyone is different in many ways. People are not only physically different, they want different things, they interpret actions differently, and they act differently in similar situations. How can we treat others respectfully if we don't know what they perceive as respectful behavior? What behavior makes you feel loved? Is that the same as the person sitting next to you? How do you know? And frankly the Golden Rule – do unto others as you would have them do unto

you, should only be your fallback position until you are able to find out what the other person wants. The real rule should be “Treat others as THEY want to be treated”. In order to follow that rule you have to ask questions, do your cultural research and pay attention to people’s behavior.

In the book, *The Five Love Languages*, Gary Chapman asserts that we should also love our Mate the way the mate wants to be loved. Sit back and picture a scene where your significant other or an imagined lover arrives home and shows you just how much they love you. What are they doing? Did they come through the door with flowers?, did they pick up dinner on the way home?, did they sing your praises, did they announce that they had the whole evening free to spend with you doing whatever you want? Or did you get a hug and a kiss? According to Dr Chapman there are 5 major categories for what makes people feel loved; Words of Appreciation, Service, Gifts, Quality Time and Physical Touch. Children need all 5, but by the time you reach adulthood most people gravitate to 2 or 3. I have a friend whose husband’s love languages are Gifts and Service. If she gives him a card and makes him dinner he feels totally loved. That wouldn’t do much for me! I need a hug, time spent with me, and every now and then I need a compliment too. Have you ever said “What does John see in Mary?” or something like that? It’s a sure bet that John doesn’t have the same love language as you. My point is – Know what makes your loved ones feel loved and give it to them. AND know what makes you feel loved and let others know what that is. Which leads to another lesson: Don’t be afraid to ask for what you want. Does that sound rude? You can still be polite and not insist on getting your way all the time! If you make a Christmas list and pass it around you may actually get something you want for Xmas. If you make people guess, who knows what you’ll get. On the other end of it, if you are given a Xmas list which only contains cars, Tahiti vacations and dangerous toys you will want to Set Expectations. About 10 years ago at work I was asked to interview

with a project that needed to staff up. When I arrived to talk to the software lead, he told me that he was too busy to talk right then and he would call me later. Well I was offended. He could have at least spent a little time with me, that was so rude. By the time that we got to sit down for the interview I was feeling pretty huffy. When he asked if I had a degree in software I said curtly “No I have a Masters from Purdue in Electrical Engineering.” Instead of acting disappointed he perked up and seemed more interested. It ended up being one of the best interviews I have ever had. The most surprising part was when I noticed I was completing his sentences. Some people find this very rude. I pointed this out to him and told him not to have me work for him if he couldn’t handle me completing his sentences. He sat back with this puzzled look on his face and then proceeded to tell me that he didn’t invite people to meetings because he considered that a waste of time. Instead of just accepting my statement, he understood that I was setting his expectations. He then used this opportunity to set my expectations. With our expectations set, with that little extra knowledge about one another, we went on to have a very successful working relationship.

Another thing that works not only with kids but with adults is setting Ground Rules and then being consistent in following them. All parents know that if you ever let a child go outside in their pajamas they will think that is always ok. When OJ Simpson’s first wife was asked if he had ever hit her she stated: “He knew that if he ever hit me he would get a frying pan upside his head”. They never got into a cycle of abuse because he knew the ground rule and he knew it would be enforced.

One of the lessons that has helped me understand people better is from a sermon by Jan Christenson. She said she started writing the sermon about the way UU’s are often whistle blowers and reveal that the Emperor has no clothes. The funny thing that happened was that the sermon took over and it ended up being about fear.

She said the thing we most hate, sneer at, are revolted by is sometimes the piece of our own selves that we are afraid to acknowledge. How often have you heard someone describing a 3rd party and you think – “no you are describing yourself”. I have heard a mother describe how fearful of heights her child is only to look over to see the child climbing a wall. I have heard others described as controlling, judgmental and too talkative when all I could think of was “Pot calling the kettle black”. How can you make sure you don’t do what you are so afraid of if you don’t even acknowledge that you have that thing inside you? Fear can so take over your life such that it compels you to do the very thing you were so afraid of doing. What Jan said she had learned to do was notice when she is feeling a particularly strong negative reaction to a person and then to see if there is a part of herself she is recognizing. Then in that recognition she acknowledged her fear of being like that. Just in the recognition and acknowledgement of fear, the fear is lessened. With the lessening of the fear comes the strength to not be what she was so afraid of.

Another sermon that really spoke to me was Jim Nielson’s sermon on conflict resolution. I learned that a resolution that is lasting comes from communication and naming the truth of the conflict out loud. South Africa made a phenomenal turn-around and has been able to create a united country in part by naming all the atrocities that occurred on both sides during their racial conflicts. Each side could see the hideousness of what they had done, and the survivors had their pain uncovered and acknowledged. This allowed people to forgive each other. And forgiveness does not help the person being forgiven, it really allows the hurt party to heal and go on with their own life. Being able to forgive others and most importantly yourself allows you to have a happier attitude. This brings me to another lesson – it is more fun to be with people who have a sense of humor and know how to be silly. Silly people have the right attitude. They know that you may as well laugh because that helps and crying doesn’t. No one is perfect. We all

pass gas and fail. That is part of being human. And the more I have a positive attitude – the more positive things happen in my life.

The last lesson I want to talk about today is that failure and hard work are needed to really enjoy life. Failure is the thing that shows you how sweet it is to succeed. Hard work and practice are the things that show you how to get from failure to success. On July 2nd of this year I had an almost perfect day. I went to the West Coast Swing Dance convention at the Camelback Inn and danced all day long. Every dance was enjoyable; every partner seemed to be happy that they danced with me. I got several complements on my spins and ability to follow. What made that so sweet was that I have been dancing for 4 years now and have gone to at least 10 conventions and have never had this experience before. This was the first time where I felt my skill level was good enough to dance with even the most advanced dancer. At work I find that I only remember the part of the project with was the hardest to complete. No matter how clever a design is, my most satisfaction comes from fixing a part of the design that failed.

Yes In Kindergarten I was taught to share everything, play fair, and don't hit people. Since then I have learned to share food with people I interact with, to let people know I appreciate them and to treat people the way they want to be treated. If we can set expectations, understand the ground rules and acknowledge the fear within ourselves and others we have a better chance of living our lives with peace and contentment. Every time we build a connection with another person we enhance our life because the quality of our lives is directly related to the happiness we find while connecting to others. To work hard, practice and allow ourselves to overcome failure leads to great joy. And if we can acknowledge to ourselves the bits of happiness as they occur we can see that our cup runith over.