

Of Interest

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Are you Making Snowmen Every Day?

By Liz Ashe

Making a snowman starts with a tiny snowball that you roll around to make it bigger and bigger. Soon it is large enough to begin your snowman.

We make snowmen every day. It's what we do when we start or perpetuate gossip and petty grievances or pick on people. Most irritations are tiny but can get blown out of proportion, especially when we tell others. Before long, things snowball.

Maybe if we only worked with ourselves, we wouldn't focus on who didn't fill the copier with paper or who didn't do their fair share. If we only worked with ourselves, who would we talk about or be in disagreement with?

Sounds pretty ridiculous but so are most petty grievances. Everyone is not going to get along perfectly all the time. No two people are alike and they have different opinions, work styles, thoughts and feelings. We may not like all the qualities that others have, but think about it, how many people actually get up in the morning, look in the mirror and say, "I wonder how many people I can upset or make miserable at work today?"

The effect we have on others is rarely planned. I once read an article that said, "Don't say anything that you wouldn't want repeated over the company loud speaker." I recall thinking how true that is, but later wondered why I don't always live by that motto. Guess I'm only human.

Being human is what life is all about and getting along with people isn't easy.

Some people thrive on hurting, ridiculing, picking on, embarrassing, tormenting or teasing others. Some have a chip on their shoulders; some like to yell, swear and bully others. Then there are those who make every endeavor to be as nice and kind, open and giving, as humanly possible. But one day they can say the "wrong thing" and trip over someone else's ego, feelings, biases, fears, turf, self-centeredness or other characteristics. It is impossible to please everyone.

Being good at interpersonal relations starts with an understanding and an acceptance of the differences of others. It is also being sensitive to the feelings of others, learning to communicate openly and non-defensively and walking in another's shoes before judging. In the movie To Kill a Mocking Bird, Atticus Finch (Gregory Peck) said, "*If you just learn a single trick Scout, you'll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view....until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it.*"

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TACTICS FOR MAKING GOODWILL SNOWMEN

- Be tolerant of differences and allow others to be who they are without judging.
- Treat others with dignity at all times and do not belittle others, especially in public.
- Listen to differing points of view.
- Say please and thank you.
- Before speaking think, "Is this kind, is this right, is this helpful and considerate?"
- Do not name call, tease or make fun of others and tell no jokes at the expense of others.
- Use no slang terms, pet names or derogatory statements to refer to a person.
- Do not bully, haze or play "harmless" pranks.
- Don't backbite, gossip and or spread lies or rumors.
- Avoid yelling and/or swearing at others.
- Pull together as part of team and work with others to get the job done.
- Use "I" statements not "You" accusations.
- Think before you criticize. Make sure your corrective feedback has a positive intention.
- If someone says something you don't understand, ask for clarification.
- Look for the strengths and positive in people.
- Cancel negative thoughts when you get one.
- Be forgiving of self and others.
- Treat others as you want to be treated.

EAP CAN HELP

If you are having difficulty in your interpersonal relations with others, call EAP. They can provide you with the skills to communicate more effectively with others.

Affiliated EAP

- *It's confidential.*
- *It's a free benefit to you.*
- *It really works.*

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Arlene Francis, in her book That Certain Something, wrote, “*I believe that all human beings are born endowed with good qualities. You may have to strain to find them on occasion, but they are there. It’s worth the trouble to seek them out. I think that the Golden Rule is the most overlooked tranquilizer in the world today.*”

As children we learned: “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” I guess that was thought up to deter the bullies on the playground, but I believe being wounded by hurtful words can be worse than physical wounds. Most of us can probably remember something mean or embarrassing that someone said to us long ago much more than a shove or a punch.

People picking on people, races hating one another, cultures downgrading other cultures, prejudice, and bias have gone on for centuries. People continue to use words and actions that cause others to feel inferior or to belittle a person’s appearance, race, religion, weight, age, size, background, mannerisms, viewpoints, sexual orientation, gender, habits, etc. People gossip and backbite, tease and taunt.

It behooves all of us to remember, we all have feelings, egos, self-esteem, pride and the same basic needs.

We all have buttons that can be pushed and can have our feelings hurt. **Criticism, teasing, hazing, put-downs, name calling, back-stabbing, bullying, gossip, cruelties, and harassing is always at the expense of someone else.**

Some people justify it by saying, “It was all in fun.” Fun for whom? We can never estimate who can “take it” versus who can be pushed over the edge. Many people appear to accept teasing or verbal abuse because they want to fit in or don’t want to be seen as overly sensitive. Perhaps it would do us all good to recall the song by Aretha Franklin called Respect.

“R-E-S-P-E-C-T, find out what it means to me...sock it to me.” Wouldn’t it be nice if we all focused on socking respect and kindness to one another?

Treating a person with respect does not mean you have to like the person or agree with their actions or way of life. It just means that you avoid behavior that is degrading, demeaning or hurtful. We can still build snowmen every day. **Just let the first tiny snowball start with goodwill and grow into goodness.**

“*I equate success with how well I sleep at night. If I do what I set out to do without having damaged another person in the process, I can sleep well.*” Rod McKuen, poet

THE BOY WITH A BAD TEMPER

A little boy had a bad temper and his father gave him a bag of nails and told him that every time he lost his temper, he must hammer a nail into the back of the fence.

The first day the boy drove 37 nails into the fence. Over the next few weeks, as he learned to control his anger, the number of nails hammered daily dwindled down. The boy discovered it was easier to hold his temper than to drive those nails into the fence.

Finally the day came when the boy didn’t lose his temper at all. He told his father about it and the father suggested that the boy pull out one nail for each day that he was able to hold his temper. The day came when all the nails were gone and the boy showed his father the fence. The father took the boy’s hand and said, “*You have done well, my son, and I’d like to teach you one more thing. Look at the holes in the fence. The fence will never be the same. When you say things in anger or things that are hurtful they leave a scar just like the holes in the fence. You can put a knife in a man and draw it out. It won’t matter how many times you say ‘I’m sorry,’ the wound is still there. A verbal wound is as bad as a physical one.*”

Anonymous

EAP CAN HELP

Affiliated EAP is a confidential assessment, short-term counseling and referral program for you and your household members. It is a free benefit provided to you by your organization. To find the number of the EAP counselor nearest you, consult your company brochure, workplace posters or call:

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