

The Importance of Our Values in Relationship-Building

By

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This has been a tough piece to write. The ideas expressed here have haunted me since I attended a social event of business professionals a few weeks ago. The one-on-one introductions at that event were like so many others I have experienced over my career. Because of this, please excuse me if my comments below do not reflect your experiences. I do suspect, however, that most of my readers will relate to the ideas below.

During the one-on-one introductions, I was asked the “typical” questions of “*where do you live*” and “*what do you do for a living*”. Innocent enough questions at first glance. They are “safe” because they are apolitical and non-confrontational. Despite this, however, I encourage you to think about the following:

Why is it more important to find out what kind of job someone has or where they live than what they and you really value?

This is what the Ancient Greeks would have described as a *Know Thyself Moment!*

I agree that a question about what kind of work someone does or where they live can be a safe ice breaker. But what does it really tell us about the person other than their income level! Do we get any real insight into what they/we value, what/who is important in their/our life, what they/we hope to still achieve. It really is an exercise to determine if they/we are “worth” spending more time together.

I know questions about politics and religion can be testy and maybe even confrontational. Given this, I am not suggesting we lead with questions about a person’s stand on *abortion... race relations... migration... gun control... taxation... wealth disparity... was Jesus Christ God...role of “The Great Prophet” in today’s world...health care...global warming...or any other “hot” political/religious issue of the day.*

What I am suggesting, however, is to reverse the field of questions by saying something like:

*Hello. I am happy to meet you. My name is ...
Have we met at the town little league ballpark/hockey rink/soccer field/PTA meeting etc. ...Did you see last night’s hockey game/soccer game/ baseball game/tennis match/etc. ...Did Did you see the recent performance of the town play/musical/concert/ etc. ...OR the recent high school musical, etc.*

These might not be the right questions for you, but I think you get the point. So far, you have said nothing confrontational, but have instead made yourself more vulnerable to the other person, while opening up potential conversations about items which reflect your values/interest. Wow!

The important thing to accomplish with new introductions is to give the other person an opportunity to respond in a way which will reveal what they value. To make this happen you will need to first say something which shows what YOU value.

Ask yourself *“do they respond in kind or do they ask you about your job or where you live as their lead question(s)”*. In either case, it will tell you a lot more about them. You can then go to a conversation about something you/they value as a discussion point or excuse yourself and move on.



Remember what Dwight Eisenhower (picture) famously said on the topic:

“A people that values its privileges above its principles soon loses both.”

Meaningful relationships are based on shared values. We need to identify our values before we can live meaningful lives with people of common interests.

Meaningful Reflections!

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