

Where the Sidewalk Ends

From a poem that I should have learned in Kindergarten

Terry Beard

I call upon the wisdom in lyrics by Shel Silverstein, to expound on the value of good relationship connections and management.

*“I will not play at tug o’ war,
I’d rather play at hug o’ war,
Where everyone hugs
Instead of tugs,
Where everyone giggles
And rolls on the rug,
Where everyone kisses,
And everyone grins,
And everyone cuddles,
And everyone wins.”*

*“For the children, they mark, they know
The place where the sidewalk ends.”*

If we don’t monitor ourselves as we walk through life, where the sidewalk ends, we let go of the child-like fantasy of an all-win society which then easily becomes a society of win-lose. Like moving from childlike, idealistic fantasy of all winners to the dictates of a competitive life foisted on us by our society.

As children in America we move insidiously from a competitive society increasingly to a society of winners and losers, an individualistic culture driven by win-lose.

In the United States, we are known as rugged individualists, guided by dogged-determined, capitalist attributes— laser-focused, with a

can-do spirit, with a never-give-up attitude— among other successful ingredients sprinkled in for good measure. This sure-fired success formula continues to drive a win-lose operating style which has made this country great. Our individualism has driven our society from its troubled and rough-cut beginnings to success beyond our wildest imagination, which we can measure easily by our many accomplishments.

But . . . do we stop to ask is enough enough? Do we take the time to ask ourselves—by continuing to measure our achievements based on our own changes—if we are sizing up others and deciding whether we’ve won, and our friends and acquaintances have lost. To know that we, at least, are doing much better than others and that knowing gives us an ego boost. But conversely, may give others an ego bust.

Today, this ‘measuring up’ is all coming at a price. Our win-lose cultural climate is sneaky by nature. Clearly it is manifesting itself in how we treat one another.

As we grow older in the American culture our idealism seems to fade with age. The questions we ask each other reveals so much about ourselves.

People knowingly ask questions of one another to take their measure as if they are sincerely interested in the other. But often, their facial features are sending another message. I

want to know if I am winning and you are losing.

How is your day going so far? We often hear when walking up to the counter to order coffee at 6:30 AM.

How is your year going so far? This is a new greeting which I learned while shopping recently, I nearly fell over in shock. This was not a daily dive on taking my measure but a deep dive in to the land of nobody's business. My lack of response said, "No we ain't going there."

Are you making any money? The banks' branch manager barked at me, as I was standing in line waiting for the next teller.

How is your health?

How are your kids doing?

How is your wife, your husband, your partner, your life?

My mother's health is not good. No secret. The folks that I was chatting with knew this. As they asked me questions, taking my measure and my inventory, I was honest and up-front thinking that they really cared. Quickly I learned they were playing the win-lose game. So, I asked them how they were doing. They said, "Perfect." And with your mother? "Perfect." OMG. I lost. We win, you lose. Sounds like a draw to me.

People in conversation find or stumble in to a crack in our sidewalk. As a conversation unfolds, people sense that maybe we are a little vulnerable, that we may have a little owie. Not good enough.

Here is another set-up. One of our two kids is doing great. Our daughter recently graduated from an Ivy League College, Summa Cum Laude, and earned a Master's Degree from the



so
What?
i'm better
than
you.

London School of Economics, and a Ph.D. in Psychology from Harvard. But the other kid, our son, is on booze or drugs, and people continue to ask. How is your son doing?

I'm learning that people come across as if they care, but do they?

Smart people know.

Let's all make a concerted effort to be authentic. We become more genuine and sincere when we do our own consciousness raising. By asking ourselves, why am I asking these questions?

One needs to develop the filter to know, if their measure is being taken. Is there a smattering of compliments for the wins? Or is the other person using main stream conversation to widen the cracks in the sidewalk?

Et voilà. When I am in Paris, this is where the sidewalk ends for me. I can let my defenses down. I embrace my child ego state, the playful ego state.

Yes, my defenses are down. Childlike.

How do I know that it is different for me when I'm in Paris?

I dream nearly every night.

As kids, as children, we all remember, we

dreamed more often.

Like a kid skipping along where the sidewalk ends, I could care less if my shirt is tucked in or out, if my clothes match as I head out to the laundromat, and if my hair is combed. As I chase down a baguette in the morning, hustle up the *NY Times International* and *Le Figaro*, or shag a cup of coffee, I say hello to everyone—a bonjour here and there. Smiling is an international language.

It is fun and amusing watching the American tourists take a whack at their use of the French language, and/or the French taking a stab at using English. Good for them! They are having fun!

As an ongoing student in the French language, I am constantly shaking hands with my childhood. We do our learning in our child-ego state.

Let's find the balance between childhood and adulthood. There is no need to lose our childhood when we are in our adulthood. As adults, let's embrace the child in each one of us. There is a fine line, and we need to learn, to know where the sidewalk ends.

As children, most of us were taught to take turns. It is the socially responsible thing to do as adults. There is a time to be competitive, but

there is always time to shake hands—with give and take—to enjoy the bountiful harvest of mutually-enhancing reciprocity.

Let's all find our serenity spot, to know where the sidewalk ends. When we re-engage with our childhood as adults, we are ready to reap the rewards of the true power of quality people connections.

It is criminal in America that so many people drive the narrative—win-lose. Those of us that live a life of win-win are those of us who, like children guided by adulthood, know where the sidewalk ends.

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