



Believing and Doing Are Two Different Things

By Rick Miller

Many times when I present the Kids at Hope belief system I will hear a number of people tell me that they believe in such concept already. That is probably correct. But believing in something and doing something about are two very different things.

The reality is we always act on what we believe. For example the Search Institute commissioned a poll to determine whether adults knew and were offering children what they needed to succeed. The results are ominous. Although 75 percent of adults said they felt they knew what children needed from them to succeed only 34 percent reported that they were offering those elements.

In other words it isn't enough to just believe; it's important to act.

The most compelling argument about why adults don't give children what they need to succeed is captured in Malcolm Gladwell's book *The Tipping Point*. The author uses the phrase *the Power of Context* to explain that our behavior at any given time is more governed by our environment or situation than by our beliefs. Gladwell offers up as evidence a study conducted by Princeton University psychologists who recruited a number of seminary students attending Princeton Theological Seminary.

The researchers wanted to determine if they could predict the future behavior of individuals whose predisposition, i.e. beliefs, would suggest compassionate actions. What they did was fascinating and enormously powerful. Each student was asked to prepare a short talk about a particular Bible theme, and then walk over to another building to present it. Between the two buildings the researchers stationed a man slumped in an alley, with head down, eyes closed, coughing and groaning.

Would the seminarians on their way to present their speeches stop to help someone in need? Most would answer yes. If the seminarians wish to minister to God's flock (and they were well aware of the biblical story of the "Good Samaritan") we would have every indication they would stop to help this person.

The final results: It depends! The variable that the researcher included i.e. *the Power of the Context*, was whether the seminarians who were heading from one building to the other felt they had time to stop or if they felt they were running late to their appointment. Only 10 percent of the seminarians who were running late stopped to help. Of the group that felt they had time to spare, 63 percent stopped.

What the researchers concluded, and what happens everyday in our relationships with children, is that the convictions of the heart and the actual contents of your thoughts are less important in the end in guiding your actions than the immediate context of your behavior. In other words “Oh you’re late” had the effect of transforming someone who was ordinarily compassionate into someone who was indifferent to suffering-of turning someone, in that particular moment into a different person.

Unfortunately, too many of our institutions serving youth have become systems for logistics not for relationships. The tasks, the test scores, the attendance, the running to one meeting after another, the reporting, the filing, the context is one in which spending quality time with children to demonstrate that you care has eroded. Like the seminarians, today’s teacher, youth worker, school administrator, social worker, clergy, and other caring adults all too often find our belief systems comprised by the context in which we exist.

Kids at Hope, therefore, is about changing reality. Once we accept our reality and then truthfully and responsibly recognize that our institutions have become bureaucracies of management then we can establish a Power of Context that permits us to be the caring adult that can make a positive difference in a child’s life. In the Kids at Hope belief system context is translated into behavior. It doesn’t suggest a revolution from what we are currently doing. It only suggests that we honor what we want to do in the first place and that is to help every child succeed, NO EXCEPTIONS!

PAGE

PAGE 1