



A Powerful Strategy for Corporate Leaders and Normal People

What Sort of Person Do You Want to Be?

Years ago when one of my sons was little, he had a great love for a particular type of Legos. For birthdays and Christmases we bought him new sets. What he enjoyed most was taking all those various sets mixing them all together and spreading them out in the back yard where he could design whatever he wished. After several months of this, I decided it would be best to pack all the Legos into a nice clean container and bring them into the house. School kids and teachers often walked past our backyard and could see everything in it and I felt the piles of Legos were an eyesore. There was only one problem with my effort to “clean up the mess”. I did not take into consideration my son’s great love for working on the Legos in the back. It was a terrible mistake I made, not listening to him, not paying attention to my son and it made him resent me.

I recently heard about a father in Florida who became irate when his order wasn’t right at a fast food restaurant. He became so volatile that the police were called. It wasn’t clear in the article why he was arrested but as the dad was being handcuffed, a gun went off and the bullet grazed the arm of one of the officers. Quickly, a policeman grabbed the gun that was in the backseat of the car. It turned out that the dad had told his four year old son to shoot the police officer and the boy did. This could have been a much worse tragedy than it already is. The four year old was sitting next to his three year old brother and may very well have accidentally shot him instead or even killed the police officer or himself. What sort of rage would lead a man to become so angry over a simple mistake made by someone at a fast food restaurant? And then even worse, to pour that fury into his little four year old son and push him toward violence, what sort of person is that? Did he even bother to listen to the staff who tried to apologize for the mistake?

James the brother of Jesus has this to say to anyone who is involved in social relationships. It is not only sound advice; it is how life is in God’s Kingdom. **My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.** (James 1:19-20 NIV) James states that this is how we must be all the time. He uses the present tense in the declaration which indicates continuous action. Another way to state this is, “My dear brothers, every single person always is to be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.” This is always the case. Perhaps you recall the time when two of Jesus’ disciples burned hotly with anger because the people of a particular village in Samaria didn’t want Jesus and his disciples to stay there due to the fact that they were on their way to Jerusalem. Angrily they asked Jesus if He wanted them to call down fire from heaven to destroy the people of the village as if it were Sodom or Gomorrah. Jesus’ response was swift. **But Jesus turned and rebuked them, and they went to another village.** (Luke 9:55-56 NIV)

James makes a clear separation between the anger of God and that of us. He puts his foot down here. **...man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.** It is never the case that we get it right with our anger. We may make what we think is good use of it. We might accomplish what was our goal in applying it to what ever is happening. James however insists that our anger is never justified and is not right. We can spend many hours discussing the origin of our anger and how it damages ourselves and

those around us but if we can just acknowledge that James does not find a bit of good in whatever anger we let simmer in us or boil over, we can move into what is the more important point here. Be quick to listen and slow to speak.

Peter was famous for blurting out whatever popped into his head. On the mount of transfiguration where Peter, James and John were with Jesus, suddenly long dead Moses and ancient Elijah appeared before them and talked with Christ. When Peter, not knowing how foolish his offer was, suggested to Jesus that they make three shelters on the mountain to commemorate the greatness of the three figures, Moses, Elijah, and Jesus, he was magnificently rebuked by the Father Himself for speaking out of turn. **While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"** (Matthew 17:5 NIV) We can all empathize with Peter because every one of us has a memory that still smolders of saying something absolutely absurd and being humiliated for what we said. Can you recall the ridiculous comment made by David's older brother when David showed up on the frontlines as the two armies of Philistia and Israel camped across from one another? The Philistine giant Goliath had issued the challenge to the Israelites for one of them to come out and fight him in a winner take all battle to the death. Every Israeli soldier, including David's older brother Eliab was scared to death to fight him. However when David got there, he wanted to know about what was happening, so he asked around among the soldiers what the deal was with Goliath. Eliab, his brother was having none of it. **When Eliab, David's oldest brother, heard him speaking with the men, he burned with anger at him and asked, "Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the desert? I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is; you came down only to watch the battle."** (1 Samuel 17:28 NIV) Can you imagine how humiliated he was when he watched as David adroitly popped Goliath in the head with a stone from his sling and then chopped off the giant's head with Goliath's own sword?

We have all been there. Some of us more than others. There are at least five reasons why we will say too much and not listen to others instead. 1. We are nervous and feel intimidated by those before us. 2. We are upset and not thinking clearly. 3. We have an agenda we are trying to push and not willing to let it be shut down by other opinions. 4. We have an uncontrolled craving to have our viewpoint heard. 5. This is the most egregious of all. We don't respect the other person and don't care what they think. Of course, sometimes, and maybe most, we just don't realize we have taken over a conversation and have not given the others with us the opportunity to share their thoughts. I think there are at least seven good reasons for making the effort to listen to others. 1. You could gain insight you didn't have before. You may learn something. 2. Every person has something to offer you. There are riches within every person you come across. 3. Because every one of us is made in the image of God, each person you meet has a little bit of God to share with you. 4. You show love by listening to others. It has been said that the greatest gift you can offer another is hearing what that person has to say. 5. You protect yourself from saying something you could regret. Sometimes the best thing you have to say is what you don't. 6. You slow your brain down so that you are less likely to make a snap decision that could cause you or those you love unnecessary pain. 7. You give God time to work in your thinking so that you develop His thoughts and see things from His point of view.

There is something very precious and holy about one who sacrifices the opportunity to speak in order to let the other person share what is in the heart. And more than that, to care about the other person with genuine love. I recently heard the moving account of Marie Antoinette's last words. She had been forced to undress in front of the guards. Her head was shaved to increase her humiliation. The former queen was paraded through the streets of Paris in a wooden cart for the people to laugh at her. As she stepped up on the guillotine that was covered with the blood of all those who had gone before her including her husband King Louis XVI, she accidentally stepped on the foot of the executioner. With great humility and concern for him, she mumbled gently and softly, "Excuse me sir, I did not mean to do that." Kindness and thoughtfulness are not lost on the mind and attention of Jesus. It must please God greatly when we make the effort to listen with care to others.