

Turning the Other Cheek

Early childhood lessons can pay off later on. Growing up in the Bible Belt of East Tennessee, I spent a lot of time in Sunday School listening to Bible stories. Lately, a principle imbedded in one of these stories unexpectedly influenced the direction of events in a positive way. I'd like to share how I got to make a difference by applying the universal principle of turning the other cheek.

Recently I was making copies at a nearby Staples. There was no one at the copy machine next to mine, but there was a stack of papers on top of it and a document inside to be copied. As it turned out, the person using this machine was in the process of putting more money on her card. Let's call her Alex. Meanwhile, a third woman whom we'll call Betty walked up to the machine and said, "I don't see anyone using this machine and I only have 3 copies to make, so I'm using this." She started scooping up all the papers on and in the machine. This got Alex's attention; she was not going to be usurped, spoke up loudly and swooped in.

To my surprise, Betty refused to budge. Since she had only 3 copies to make, she felt she had a right to the unattended machine. Alex, on the other hand, was adamant that she had the prior claim because she was there first. Their tone and tempo escalated and they seemed to be heading towards a cat fight.

I had been standing at my machine making copies and observing these events. Suddenly, out of my mouth flew an offer for Betty to use my machine. I quickly removed my documents and card key, held the top up and asked her to put her document and card key in, which she did. I kept myself calm, upbeat and non-judgmental, focused on providing a solution for both their needs. Betty quickly made her 3 copies, thanked me and left. Then Alex thanked me and I heard myself saying, "Somebody needed to turn the other cheek, so I did."

I've had decades of training in focusing on the big picture and doing what works. Perhaps Alex and Betty have had little or no training - at least until their encounter with me. I've also experienced decades of trial and error - getting stuck like they did in being right and making others wrong, dominating and avoiding domination and struggling to observe what does and doesn't work. I felt grateful that my training allowed me to seize an opportunity to make a difference and surprised that my early Bible lesson found such real and spontaneous expression. It was a WIN-WIN-WIN all around!