

On Racism

By Alan E. Ramos

This is either a fact or a belief, I'm not quite sure which: We are not born racists; racism is learned,

I remember when my daughter was five, she was watching the Survivor final and when I asked her which contestant she wanted to win, she told me "the one with the curly hair". The finalists were an African-American woman and a Caucasian woman. The only difference that she saw between the two was that one had straight hair and one had curly hair. I should mention that my daughter is Chinese.

It is when we begin to "learn" about the other "differences" that we begin to form prejudices. These prejudices frame how we respond to people. If we are told many negative things about a people, say Muslims for instance, our approach and reaction to them will be negative. We have to work to overcome that negativity in order to see them as individuals; let them show themselves for what and who they are, not judged by our preconceptions.

How our experiences frame our approach to things is illustrated by the following example. If you got a job in a machine shop and your job was to pick up and polish short steel rods (and you had no training whatsoever) you would pick up a rod and polish. And you would continue to pick up each and every rod without giving it much thought. Now, what if someone had heated a rod and placed it among all the other rods. They all look the same, so you can't know the hot one from the cold ones. If you picked up the hot one, it would severely burn your hand. For the rest of your life, you would look at any rod as a potential danger to you and you would pick it up with tongs or heavy gloves, but you would never trust that a rod was cold again.

And so it is with people. If you don't know anything about someone, but you have been told that all of the people like him/her are bad or dangerous or

somehow unacceptable, you would avoid that person or at the very least treat them with a wariness that they do not deserve. Any data about them would be filtered through the prejudice that exists in your mind. The people for whom you feel a negativity will have to overcome that negativity to be heard by you. Conversely, the people about whom you have a positive feeling would be accepted immediately without having to run the gauntlet of your prejudice.

The irony of this dynamic is that scammers know this better than anyone. They know how to look and sound in order to be readily accepted. Ironically, one of the most fertile grounds for scammers are churches, because people believe that "if they are a member of our church/religion, they must be good people". Well, not necessarily.

Racism is not always overt, it is often subtle. This can be the most dangerous factor of all, because when it is subtle it is easily denied. The lesson here is that we all develop prejudices (both good and bad) over time and it is incumbent upon us to constantly be on our guard to not let those prejudices lead us to be harmed or to harm others. We need to tolerate each other just a bit more every day. I know that there are those amongst us that make this seemingly simple thought an incredibly difficult task. So join me in the seemingly impossible (at least for me) task of trying to be a better person every day, even if it means tolerating idiots and the idiotic thoughts that they share with us. End of Sermon.