

## Values

Have you noticed how when you put your focus on something it seems to appear all over the place? Like when you want to buy a particular kind of car you seem to suddenly notice that car where ever you go. Since Angie asked if I would like to submit an article on values it seems like each time I turn around, I am aware of how my values are directing what I do. Under normal circumstances I probably wouldn't have noticed what a significant role my values were playing in the responses that I chose. As I look back I realize how unconsciously my values play out in my decisions and responses to life.

One of the values my husband, Mike, and I both hold strongly is that of respect. Our son, Chad, recently turned five is at an age where he presents many opportunities for us to demonstrate and teach what living a respectful life looks like. I haven't been conscious of the fact that we have been instilling the value of respect until it was brought to my attention by a number of people. Over a period of a couple of weeks his teacher commented to me on how very polite he was to her and the other children, always remembering to say please and thank you. A parent of one of his friends commented on how thoughtful he was and another parent told me how she noticed that he tended to attempt to bring in fairness in resolving disputes among his friends. Of course I was very proud of my little guy but more than that it got me thinking about what it was in Chad that was bringing about these responses in him, bearing in mind that neither Mike nor I were there to play any direct influence. As I looked at each behavior he chose it seemed to me that while they were different responses to different situations, they were all coming from a common value of respect. When I look at how we live our life I realize that our value of respect permeates all aspects of our lives, how we think and treat each other on all levels – physically, emotionally and mentally. Chad has the ongoing opportunity of seeing how respect is accorded others as well as how we accord respect to ourselves. It includes not only politeness and manners but, more importantly, to my mind, how we deal with conflict. In these situations he gets to experience how we are usually able to listen to each other, stand up for what we believe, express our anger, disappointment or frustration in such a way it doesn't violate the other party in any way. On occasions, and there have been a few, I have allowed my quick mouth and expressive way (did I mention I am half Italian), to behave in somewhat of a less than respectful way. At these times Chad has gotten to see what it looks like to go back and make repairs by taking ownership for the disrespectful behavior, apologizing and together doing what is needed to bring us back into one accord.

To me, living a value means that when we behave in a way that is out of alignment with that value, we experience the "Gap" between what we say we stand for and how we experience ourselves in that moment. We then do what it takes to close that gap.

Another way of living that value is that we react consistently when that value is violated in some way. Even in situations that seem out of our control we seek ways to influence the situation. In keeping with our value of respect we had the unfortunate opportunity the other day to witness a much larger older brother bully his younger brother. Mike and I were at a school function when this older brother took offense to the fact that his younger brother got to be ahead of him in a line. Before we knew it he had grabbed his brother pulled him out the line and began punching him in the face and stomach. Mike jumped in, pulled the boy off his brother and very clearly let

him know that behavior was unacceptable. It seemed to have no effect on him as he jumped the line grabbed what he wanted and headed off saying, “At least I got what I wanted before him”. It was such a violation of my core values that even as I write this I experience indignation. We did what we could in the moment, making sure that the younger brother was okay and letting him know that his brother’s behavior was not acceptable to us. I then reported the incident to school officials who were in a position to identify the parents and let them know what had occurred.

In the past we had spoken with Chad about what being a bully means. So later when we spoke about the incident he was able to draw from his cognitive understanding and relate it to his actual experience. He had the opportunity to talk about what it must have felt like for the younger brother and to express his feelings at what he witnessed. This experience affected Chad deeply, to the point where he dreamt about it and spoke about it for days. As I look back on that event I see once again how Chad got to witness and experience what it looks like to live our values. While we had no direct control over that boy’s ongoing bullying behavior there were things we could do to influence the situation. Living our values means taking action even when we are not directly involved. Most important for me was that Chad got to see that his parents automatically respond in a way that was consistent with what we say we stand for.

As I contemplate my understanding of values and how they play out in my life I ask the bigger question “How does this understanding of values affect us as a community, as a society and as a country?” I realize that knowing my core values and how they influence my life helps me to do my part in creating the kind of community, society and country I want to live in. It also helps me to manage my thinking when those values are violated so that I stay true to what is important to me regardless of outside influences. So how then do I deal with what seems these days to be a daily violation of another of my core values – Peace? I go back to that great concept we talk about in most of our courses “Circles of Influence”. First I look at what I can control for. I practice daily doing what it takes to maintain my inner peace. Secondly, I look at what I can influence for. My influence comes with living and practicing peace in my daily life, and that means confronting and addressing conflict when it arises. Ghandi is a great inspiration to me in this regard. Lastly I acknowledge what is out of my control and to the best of my ability I let it go.