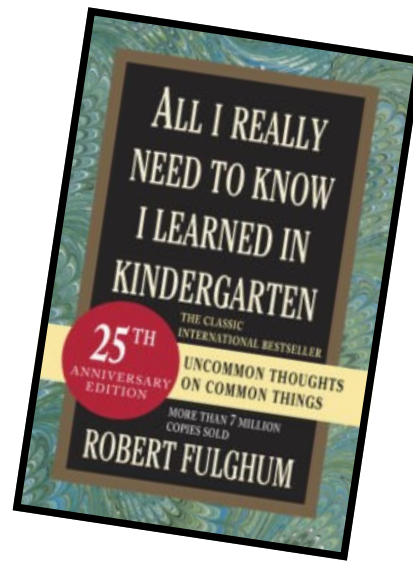


All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten

“...I realized then that I already know most of what’s necessary to live a meaningful life - that it isn’t all that complicated. I *know* it. And I have known it for a long, long time. Living it - well, that’s another matter, yes? Here’s my Credo:

All I Really Need To Know about how to live and what to do and how to be I learned in kindergarten. Wisdom was not at the top of the graduate-school mountain, but there in the sandpile at Sunday School. These are the things I learned:

- ⇒ Share everything.
- ⇒ Play fair.
- ⇒ Don’t hit people.
- ⇒ Put things back where you found them.
- ⇒ Clean up your own mess.
- ⇒ Don’t take things that aren’t yours.
- ⇒ Say you’re sorry when you hurt someone.
- ⇒ Wash your hands before you eat.
- ⇒ Flush.
- ⇒ Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you.
- ⇒ Live a balanced life - learn some and think some and draw and paint and sing and dance and play and work every day some.
- ⇒ When you go out into the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands, and stick together.
- ⇒ Wonder. Remember the little seed in the Styrofoam cup: The roots go down and the plant goes up and nobody really knows how or why, but we are all like that. Goldfish and hamsters and white mice and even the little seed in the Styrofoam cup - they all die. So do we.
- ⇒ And then remember the Dick-and-Jane books and the first word you learned - the biggest word of all—LOOK.



Everything you need to know is in there somewhere. The Golden Rule and love and basic sanitation. Ecology and politics and equality and sane living.

Take any of those items and extrapolate it into sophisticated adult terms and apply it to your family life or work or your government or your world and it holds true and clear and firm. Think what a better world it would be if we all - the whole world - had cookies and milk about three o’clock every afternoon and then lay down with our blankies for a nap. Or if all governments had a basic policy to always put things back where they found them and to clean up their own mess.

And it is still true, no matter how old you are - when you go out into the world, it is best to hold hands and stick together. (Robert Fulghum, 1986)

Many years ago in Allentown, Pennsylvania, after attending my two-day class on Management and Leadership Skills, a local businesswoman asked me if I would conduct an on-site seminar for her team of managers and supervisors. That happened quite a bit over the years, and as usual, I said yes.

In preparation for the event we spoke about the particular challenges and issues she would like to address. There were many. One of the things she was concerned about was what she called “negativity in the work group.” When I pressed her for more details, she described how employees were constantly “gossiping and talking smack” behind each other’s backs. So much so she felt it was negatively impacting morale, productivity, sales, teamwork, and even attendance and retention. I said we could try to figure something out to “fix” the problem, but she said, “Good luck with that one. You said in your seminar that without a rule or policy it’s impossible to hold employees accountable for their behavior. How can you make a policy for people to be nice to each other and not gossip?”



A Friendly Suggestion (or two)

She was right. I had said that. A manager or company cannot fairly, and in some cases, legally, hold employees accountable for rules that don’t exist. So I took that as a personal challenge. Could I come up with a *policy* to address that particular behavior.? After several failed attempts, I came up with an actual *policy*, which her company adopted and eventually printed in their Employee Handbook. Here it is:

“All team members shall interact with other team members in a positive and encouraging manner. If an issue arises between you and another team member, you are to speak directly to that team member in order to resolve the issue. If the issue cannot be resolved, the only other person to discuss things with is your immediate supervisor.”

Of course it took a lot of retraining and reminders, but after about six months of reconditioning, the manager reported to me that the *policy* was having a positive impact on the team. The policy clearly stated that if Johnny had a problem with Mary he was to speak only to Mary to fix it. Complaining about it to Barbara, Tom, or Sally was a clear violation of company policy, not to mention it served no purpose other than to make their day a little less positive or enjoyable.

For those reasons and more, I’ve always tried to self-impose this policy on myself, and I think it would have a positive impact on us as a team if we all did the same. If we have a problem or issue with a person, speak ONLY to that person to try and fix things. If it can’t be fixed, take it Rhonda. That’s my Friendly Suggestion...

There is one other thing I have always tried to abide by when deciding whether or not to share information with a colleague. I ask myself three questions about what I want to say and the information I want to share: 1. Is it true? 2. Is it kind? 3. Is it necessary? For me to actually share the information, the answer to at least two of those questions must be YES.