

Too often we hide behind policies

BEYOND BUZZWORDS



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What's wrong with this picture?

- Suppliers get contracts because they can do things faster and more cost effectively than the purchaser, then that same purchaser turns around and insists that the supplier look, act and have the same (sometimes dysfunctional) processes that they do.

- A secretary wants to trade overtime worked this week for time off with her young son next week. The employer is willing but it's against the law.

- Employees look for and need feedback daily, and the human resources department puts a process in place to assure that it happens at least once a year. Now, instead of welcoming a few minutes of constructive coaching from their boss, employees dread the annual "what you did wrong this last year" dump.

- As parents and employers, we tell our schools that we are looking for graduates with values and principles and skills, yet teachers and administrators are afraid to teach values for fear they will somehow cross a line between church and state.

- In an attempt to assure a quality product is produced, we create universally accepted measurement systems to monitor our processes. Then we spend more time and resources chasing the measurement and checking off the box than we do on delivering a quality product or service.

- To make sure people are treated "fairly," we institute uniform, across-the-board pay increases. Now people see increased compensation as an entitlement of time, not performance and contribution.

What have we done to ourselves?

It seems everywhere I go recently I've been struck by the many ways we make decisions with the right intentions, but, in the long term, with the wrong results. Why? We see things that need to be "fixed," but instead of dealing directly with difficult issues or the root cause of the problem, we create rules, policies, systems, even laws to hide behind.

BUT BY the time we realize it, we're so entrenched in the system and the rules that we don't ever see what we've done to ourselves. I ask again...why? And what do we do about it?

Why is it easier to create a new policy or procedure or law than to hold people accountable for doing what's right in the first place? I know we often have different views of what "right" is, but these examples aren't about hotly debated subjects. They're about good, old basic common sense. Why do we take the easy route rather than deal directly with the problem?

I sure don't know all the answers, but the most obvious one in my experience is that it's hard. It's easier to make a law or set a policy than to be responsible for our actions and to hold others responsible for theirs.

SELF-RESPONSIBILITY is a lost art form in many of our business and social communities today. How else can you explain someone winning a lawsuit against the coffee maker when an individual is stupid enough to spill hot coffee on herself? We are so concerned about making sure that our rights aren't violated that we forget that it is we who are responsible for our actions in the first place.

We make choices. We choose to develop our skills or not to develop them. To behave with integrity or deceit. To espouse change or to resist it.

Our choices have consequences. We are responsible for the choices we

make and, consequently, for the consequences. Sounds pretty simple to me. But yet as individuals, as parents, as employers, as citizens, we continually make more rules, more laws, more policies that, in an attempt to assure that the right thing is done, actually take that responsibility away.

HOW DO WE stop it? It's everywhere. In the big picture it seems overwhelming, but at least I know what I'm going to do. I'm going to stop me from doing it. I'm not going to play anymore. The next time someone comes to me to put a policy or procedure in place to "fix" something, I am going to ask "why?" until they think I'm a 3-year-old.

The next time I get tempted to create a new system to take care of the ill of the day, I'm going to call my "cowboy" entrepreneurial friends to get a good dose of common sense. I will not vote for, support or be a party to approaches to regulating their lives. I will hold myself responsible for my behaviors and my choices, and I will teach my children to be responsible for others.

THAT MAY SOUND silly, but it's a start. And it will be hard. But it's a start I can be responsible for.

Want to help? I learned a long time ago that, alone, the only thing I can change is me. Why not join me? Why not take some personal responsibility for putting an end to our foolish behaviors? Hard things are easier to do when you have others to share them with.

We can laugh at ourselves together and see how many dumb things we can stop being a part of. Margaret Mead once said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." I believe she's right.

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