A Story of Cooperation

Since a base needs to be strong and long lasting, I felt it was important to further look at cooperation this month. I recently heard a story of cooperation on The Today Show that I would like to share with you. Along with it comes a “Lesson Learned” which is very often a consequence of cooperation.

Jena Bush shared the following story. Eight years ago the Republican George W. Bush family was about to leave the White House and the Democratic Barack Obama family was about to move in. She and her sister Barbara decided to write a letter to the President’s two daughters who were of a similar age when their father had become President. What an act of cooperation. While it was quite a lengthy letter the following is a short summary. “As two daughters of a President, you will be sharing an experience that we have had for the last eight years. We understand some of what you are feeling and experiencing. You are not alone”. The Bush girls shared some of what they had experienced, but really so much more than that. It is an excellent example of cooperation. “ Just like you we were two sisters who were about to experience something we have never done before and that few will”.

They included in their own way some lessons learned. There were so many things that would be new, but very enjoyable, like all the different people that they would be meeting. Perhaps the biggest lesson was to stay out of the adult business. With two parties and three branches of government and is lots of different options. They were telling the new sisters to not get caught in the work of the President. First Lady. Michelle responded in kind and wrote a letter back.

Now it is eight years later and again the two sisters decided to write another letter to the Obama sisters. Just like them they had grown from young girls to young women who would be starting the first steps of their adult life. They acknowledged some of the same kinds of experiences that each set of sisters had while living in the White House. They again had some lessons learned to share. The first was that they needed to be themselves. It is their life. They will be going to college, choosing career paths and doing new things.

The second lesson I thing was even more important for not only them, but for all of us and especially for civility. They were told that not only would they make mistakes, but it was so really ok to do so. I see so much emphasis on perfect. In professional football, each season begins with the goal of winning all 16 of their games. In gymnastics, diving, and figure skating each competitor goal is a perfect 10. All of us wanted 100’s on our tests. With this view mistakes are terrible, terrible and to be avoided at all costs. We take actions to block out mistakes in any way we can Many of which are uncivil like denying, minimizing, blaming. Our view becomes distorted and really blocks out civility and cooperation.

The truth is mistakes do happen to each of us regularly. Let’s not abhor them, but deal with them. We need to honor and embrace them. This is one of the things that makes us human, connects us to each other, a way we can cooperate by understanding we are hurt and unhappy about a mistake, but others will help us to learn from this mistake and do it less often. So when you make a mistake, stop and tell yourself that you have made a mistake. Now you are ready to connect with yourself and others to find ways to better the situation.

What wonderful gifts the Bush daughters gave the Obama girls. Let’s all cooperate by sharing our learning with others.

Orlaine I. Gabert

Door County Civility Project