

Never Judge a Book by its Cover

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“Never judge a book by its cover.” Most of us have heard the adage countless times in our lives.

It seems to make so much sense, and few of us would disagree. But recently I was hit upside the head (fortunately not literally) with the realization that adages, even those that reflect our values, can become so familiar that the original wisdom they were based upon is lost. I believe reflect life philosophies, value statements and personal mantras; they are one’s compass for life. In fact, lots of people must agree with me, because there are multiple resources available (on the World Wide Web, in books, and at seminars) that teach about developing your own personal life mission statement. But, I’ll get back to this a little later when I finish the original story.

I was in my new neighborhood, which I adore for its diversity, among many other things. I was packing the car for a short road trip to the mountains for a wedding. Two teenagers I didn’t recognize were walking past my house down the middle of the street. As I made eye contact with them, I asked how they were doing. The two were dressed similarly, in a way that many people would automatically stereotype as “scary.” They admitted they were very lost...not a surprising situation considering that the streets in my neighborhood curve, loop, and change

names several times within a mile. (In truth, the first four times I drove to my new residence, I got lost!) I gave them directions, and wished them well.

By the time my friends and I got on the road, the two guys had made their way to the final turn of their destination, probably a mere mile away. We stopped to make sure they were okay, and one of them offered a bit more information about their dilemma. In short, the two had been left unexpectedly without a ride home when their friend (and ride) had been summoned to a family emergency. Stuck in a strange neighborhood alone at their friend's house, the two boys decided to set off on foot to the nearest bus station, not realizing how maze-like the streets were in the area. They also explained that they didn't have enough money for both of them to ride the bus home. The smallest bill my boyfriend and I had between the two of us was a \$5 bill, so we handed that over to the guys. They seemed overwhelmed with gratitude.

We didn't think about it again, that is, until the envelope without a return address arrived about a week later. The envelope contained a \$5 bill and a note. The writer of the note thanked us profusely for the \$5 loan, saying that most people wouldn't even make eye contact with the two that had been lost a week ago, let alone stop by the side of the road and hand over \$5. He said that most people would have been concerned about having their car jacked or being mugged because of the way the two of them looked. The young writer then wrote a blessing to us, saying we were kind and compassionate, obviously here on this earth to do good work. In

writing, he prayed that the two of us would continue to be blessed exponentially with kindness and compassion, friendship and happiness. He added that his mom, the actual one who repaid the loan, was very grateful to us for helping the two boys return safely home.

As far as I'm concerned, the small debt was repaid, with interest, above and beyond what I ever would have expected. The note included with the \$5 reminded me of the importance of having my own life's guiding principles in the forefront of my mind as much as possible so that I'm more likely to repeatedly act accordingly. How many times have I judged someone based on the way they looked on the outside, or acted as though my assumptions about a person were the absolute truth?

In fact, my guiding philosophy is expressed in part by a quote from Anne Frank's Diary: "I keep my ideals because in spite of everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart" (assume positive intent). One of my favorite quotes is from Gandhi: "Be the change you wish to see in the world" (walk your own talk). However you prefer to say it, I think we get closer and closer to living in accordance with our value systems in our daily actions when our personal mission statement, summing up those adages we believe but take for granted, is in place.

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About Arapahoe/Douglas Mental Health Network (ADMHN)

ADMHN is a private, nonprofit 501 © (3) corporation providing professional, comprehensive behavioral health care and substance abuse treatment primarily, but not exclusively, in Arapahoe and Douglas counties. We offer programs for adults, seniors, families, couples and children. These services include counseling, psychiatry, crisis services, case management, substance abuse treatment, victim services, an adult acute treatment unit, adult supported and residential housing, services to the criminal justice system, vocational and social rehabilitation, a day treatment therapeutic school and school-based services. Arapahoe/Douglas Mental Health Network has an on-site pharmacy. We offer community education, wellness programs and a Speakers Bureau. Learn more at admhn.org.

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