

Fix yourself first

It's perhaps universal nature.

We tend to see other people's problems first, and more clearly, than we see our own.

But we need to, above all, fix ourselves first.

Last week, I offered up a few movies to watch -- and I suggested several of them because of the introspection they would bring. Although I'm not great at introspection, I do find that evaluating my own challenges is a necessary first step in order to fix any circumstance that I find myself in. Why is that? It's because when I don't look at my own challenges in a rational, organized way, I tend to find that I misjudge the challenges of the situations I find myself in.

Scientists have found that when they get down to the very core of the building blocks of matter, that merely viewing a situation can change the results they would get. You can understand that this bothers scientists -- after all, matter should act the same way, despite whether someone is looking at it or not -- but nevertheless, it appears to be true.

In the same way, when we view a situation, we change it. We may not change the situation itself, but by viewing it, we view it through our distinct set of filters. How we use those filters shows how we look at life.

Let's look at this premise in a couple of different ways.

First off, as an example, if I as a man, had my heart crushed by an evil woman (I'm not saying that I did -- my wife is the most wonderful woman I've ever met, and my ex-wife never fully crushed my heart, although she damaged it a bit), then I might view other women through that particular set of circumstances. That would adjust the way I viewed reality -- through a distorted view brought upon by my own experiences.

But if I were to look at my life, make repairs where necessary, and re-visit my view of reality, I would tend to see a vast difference in the way I viewed the world around me.

Our circumstances, our biases, and our experiences tend to adjust the way we see life.

Let me give you another example.

The recent meltdown in financial stocks left a lot of people upset and bothered. And yet, here in the midst of this, we hear that Warren Buffett told a group that if he was looking for something to invest in at that time, he would invest in a couple of bank stocks. Why? Experience taught him that the stocks would rebound, because the banks involved (and I'm not going to name them here) were well-run and well-capitalized.

What did people gain from his insight? One of those banks was trading at 7, and is now trading over 26.

Perspective may not really determine reality, but it determines our view on reality. As such, we should be certain our perspective is a rational one -- and that means we have to fix ourselves first.

So fixing ourselves first helps make certain that our perspective on life is accurate.

Secondly, We need to fix ourselves first because it's the right thing to do.

Anyone can criticize -- and in fact, almost everyone does criticize. At the right time, in the right way, criticism is a useful thing. Toyota, for example, analyzed every process with a critical eye, in an attempt to fix whatever problems might arise in their manufacturing process, before those problems were passed on to the customer.

In such cases, where critical analysis is applied to making a process or an organization stronger, criticism helps a process become stronger and better.

But in most cases, criticism is used for other reasons -- to ridicule enemies (or even friends), to attempt to achieve some sort of advantage, or just because we like to criticize others.

I imagine you know someone who is super-critical of others; perhaps it's you. What I've found from looking at these people, including some people I know who work in the press, is that many of those people who are hyper-critical of others soon become somewhat nasty individuals. Negativism rules their lives; optimism never finds a place in their day-to-day outlook. I hate to call it a cancer of the soul -- but that's what it often becomes.

If you find yourself settling into the hypercritical phase, take a step back, and re-evaluate your life. You can do more good by taking a more supportive outlook

than you can by criticizing everything that moves.

Third, when we fix ourselves first, we become more able to lift others. Think of the problems in our lives as weaknesses in our foundation. We become like a builder's crane built on a weak supporting structure. As a crane like that tries to lift a load, it will buckle or collapse under the weight -- weight that it could easily handle if its foundation was strong.

As leaders in the world, we must make sure that our foundation is strong, so we can lift others to greater heights, like the builder's crane can lift vast weights to construct buildings of greater heights.

It's good to try and change the world -- but just remember to fix yourself first. Shore up your own foundation, and then try to lift others. Choose to avoid a hyper-critical life. Gain a proper perspective. Look for the value in others, and in ourselves as well, and fix the weak spots in our lives to make them stronger than ever before.

Copyright, 2009, by Daryl R. Gibson. All rights reserved. Permission is hereby granted for the non-commercial redistribution of this document as long as it remains intact with this copyright and all other lines. This license does not extend to the use of this material in a compilation, whether for profit or non-profit use. Join us at <http://www.weeklywisdom.com>.