

Lead By Example

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“He that gives good advice builds with one hand; he that gives good council and example, builds with both; but he that gives good admonition and bad example, builds with one hand and pulls down with the other” quipped Francis Bacon. Good, bad or indifferent setting examples are leadership. What kind of examples do you set for your children, family and friends?

In the 4-H world, we are privileged to work with many facets of adults and youth. Through all of these working relationships, we see different personalities, traits, characteristics and beliefs that are instilled in the youth of tomorrow. All of these occur on a day to day basis and we need to remind ourselves of the role of example in our lives that we may or may not be aware that we cast upon others. After all, as adults, we shape the youth of the future. What do we want to teach them? What kind of examples do we want to set?

With the months that pass, I continue to settle into my office and sift through the various materials. I came across a document that I remember reading as a youth and find it still very applicable to today's society and youth. An article published by Larry Mrozinski titled “Learning By Example” drives home the point of what are we really teaching our youth. A friend of his wrote a short story to provide a clear message. While this short story was developed with 4-H aged youth as an example, this is applicable to every child across the board. Focus on the big picture message.

This story talks about “Tommy” between the ages of 8 and 20. Each year of his life, a rule is broken by various adult figures in his life and this youth is told every time, “It's O.K. kid, everybody does it.” By the time this youth turned 20 years old, a friend offered him so cocaine. His friend said, “It's O.K. kid, everybody does it.” The story goes on to say, “When Tommy was arrested later that night for using cocaine and called his family to ask them to bail him out of jail, they told him, “How could you have brought such disgrace to your family, you never learned any of this at home, where did you go wrong?” After hearing of his arrest, Tommy's 4-H leader, FFA advisor, county agent, grandparents, uncle, veterinarian and neighbors were also shocked.” The story wrapped up with this final quote: “If there is one thing the adult world can't stand, it's a kid that breaks the rules.....”

As adults, volunteers, teachers, mentors and parents we need to take a look at what we teach our youth. Are we leading by setting positive examples? Do we teach youth what is right no matter how hard it is or how much it may hurt? Do we focus too much on “it's all about winning” instead of what the program is truly designed to teach?

I challenge each and every one of you who touch the lives of youth to take some time and evaluate the examples you set for them. Do you abide by rules, uphold ethical values, and communicate in a positive manner? Our actions shape our youth. Our youth are the future. What do we want the future to look like? We need to build tomorrow's leaders with both our hands and give them the tools to become successful.