



“Maturity and Growth” Part 1

Today I wanted to share my thoughts on the subject of maturity and growth. Before I delve into the details, I should probably give the reader some background as to why this particular subject surfaced for me.

Last week I was visiting with an assistant principal at a local school in Orange County, discussing what might be done with students assigned to detention in one form or another. Those of you who know me well, know that I have facilitated teen group encounter experiences during in-house detentions at local high schools, delivered in a way that is in stark contrast to the more traditional, punitive methodologies. For those not yet in the Teen Encounters inner circle, the results have been rewarding for both students and facilitator in deeply meaningful ways. I hope there will be more to come, hence my visit with this particular high school AP.

Prior to my leaving his office, the AP indicated that the district was in the process of deciding amongst various programs, in consideration of what might be done with students in detention. I left thinking the obvious: How will the district decide whether any of the alternatives were effective? What was the change that was sought? As is my way, I tend to “zoom out” of the particular problem at hand, and inquire in a more expansive way. I asked myself, in our helping relationships as teachers, parents, family, and friends, “How do our interactions with teens help or hinder?” If we are truly helping to teens, to what end? What is the result we hope to achieve? How will we know if we have succeeded or failed? I thought that, with a specific end-gain in mind, only then are we able to assess, compare, and choose responsibly in the way we, and others, engage today’s teens.

At this point I want to make an observation that I think most of us can agree upon, regardless of our particular orientation. For those that subscribe to evolution through Darwinian ideology, man, the species, has changed very little if at all over many thousands of years. For those more faith based, the principles and ideologies, which govern mankind, were and are applicable over similar periods of time. This idea again supports an unchanging view of man - at his core. By extension, we would expect man’s basic needs to remain as they were in the past.

We would then expect that Abraham Maslow’s famous hierarchy of human needs to remain relevant today. For those unfamiliar with Maslow, he details specifically what needs drive all of us, and in which order of priority. The point has been made that, by and large in most Western cultures, we are fed and safe: Sadly there are exceptions to the rule, as we are acutely aware of through the news. At the top end of the hierarchy, appears something entitled “self-actualization”. This translates into each of us becoming what we truly *are individually*, as part of our unique innate being.

I know from talking to my now young adult offspring that time literally disappears when they are doing what they truly love. In Sarah’s case, she loves athletics, and in particular, volleyball. I can tell when I watch her play, how she becomes one with the court, the ball, and her partner. Kyle, compared with sister, is as different as night and day, and yet somehow the same. When he is



recording and mixing a band, work becomes play. He loves sharing with me how busy he is, and yet how happy he is with all the work. As a parent, I think that somehow providing a “fertile” environment to facilitate the transition through the hierarchy might be a good objective.

Before I close for now, I want to point out that there is a significant gap between the food/safety needs that appear at the base of the Maslow triangle, and the tip of self-actualization. We need to talk about what appears in this gap, and how we facilitate or frustrate or our kids’ transition from the bottom to the top, remembering that we all move through the hierarchy of needs in order.

P.S. I don’t know where the time went, but I enjoyed every second of writing this. I am thinking about Maslow in the first person now!