

Values Drive Behaviors; Principles Drive Outcomes

Dennis Hooper, copyright © 2010, published in the *Savannah Business Journal* on Monday, April 26, 2010

My previous column described why values are so valuable. Your values influence every choice you make. (To see that column, go to my website, click on “Article Archives,” and click on “Why Values are Valuable.”)

Yet sometimes what you intend doesn’t exactly turn out the way you had expected. Why is that?

Your values are not the same as principles or natural laws, such as gravity or inertia. Stumble on the stairs, and you are likely to fall--whether you know about, understand, or even agree with “gravity.” Further, an object at rest will remain at rest until acted on by an outside force--and this truth doesn’t require your approval.

Outcomes are always a result of principles or natural laws and will never be swayed just because you prefer things to be different. Instead, you should become aware of natural laws, seek to understand and apply them, and live in harmony with them.

Although you have total control over your choices, once you take some action, you have no control over the outcome. Stated another way, once a behavior has been set in motion, the effect of the behavior may have a very different impact than what you intended.

You choose your behaviors at least partially based on the outcome you desire to create. But sometimes your predictions are not accurate, because you cannot precisely determine in advance which principles will dominate.

I’m sure you’ve had an experience where your motive in executing a given behavior was purely honorable. But somehow, the action inadvertently hurt someone. Maybe it was a physical action, such as driving a car--no one intends to cause an automobile accident.

Maybe you decided to publicly thank the seven people who contributed to the success of a major project--only to have someone point out afterwards that you overlooked (and hurt the feelings of) a very critical eighth contributor. It wasn’t your intentions that drove the effect of that particular behavior. The effect of the oversight, despite your honorable motives, was painful for someone important to you. If you could do it over, you would.

Natural laws control the outcomes of your behaviors. You don’t create the natural laws, and you don’t have the privilege of selecting which ones apply to you and which ones you can exempt.

The physical principles such as gravity and inertia are easy to see. But there are also interpersonal and spiritual principles. You can’t violate any of the principles without suffering what are sometimes very uncomfortable consequences.

“Keeping promises” is an example of an interpersonal principle. People tend to trust those who have a history of following through on the commitments they make. Fail to execute the behaviors you’ve promised a couple of times, however, and people will begin to doubt your integrity.

“Service” is an example of a spiritual principle. People who understand this natural law are willing to serve not based on what it will bring to them, but because they are blessed with the ability and opportunity to contribute. They find the effects of honorable service are beneficial both for the individuals served and for themselves.

Will you agree that your values drive the choices you make--from among a variety of optional behaviors? (You also have the ability to be very creative in the generation of those options! Sometimes we don’t give ourselves the freedom to think creatively!)

Will you concede that principles that are beyond your control, and sometimes beyond your knowledge of how they will apply in this particular instance, drive the outcomes of your behaviors?

If both are true, it follows that your success in life will be a function of how closely your values align with natural laws. Through whatever means available to you, you would be well served to learn what those principles are--and adopt values that align with them! The result will be greater influence with others and greater peace for yourself.

I believe God describes most of those interpersonal and spiritual principles to us in our owner's manual, the Bible. God created everything (see John 1:3), including the principles that drive the outcomes set in motion by our choices.

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