

Use Your Power to Serve Those You Influence

by Dennis Hooper, copyright © 2010, published in the *Houston Home Journal* on Wed., December 22, 2010

It's Christmas, when many in our society celebrate the birth of Jesus. Oh, I realize that Christians are not the only individuals who have special holy days at this time of year. Whatever your faith, however, I invite you to consider this: *What If Jesus Had Never Been Born?*

That's the title of a book published in 1994 by D. James Kennedy. He describes very beneficial societal changes that followers of Jesus have introduced. For example, did you know that hospitals and formal education for the masses are Christian innovations?

We can't imagine what the world was like two thousand years ago. History records that human life was expendable. In classical Rome's supposed advanced civilization, abortion was rampant and abandonment of infants was commonplace. A father exercised absolute tyranny over his children. He could sell them as slaves or end their lives at will. In some circles, killing one's child was considered an act of beauty!

What I experienced this weekend was a huge contrast with that description. My wife and I cared for our grandson, now three months old. As I held Riley and he smiled at me, tears of gratitude dripped down my face. I remembered how Jesus had lovingly said "Let the little children come to me."

I examined Riley's fingers, ears, and smiling eyes. I simply marveled that those precious features are the result of the merging of two specialized cells, one from our daughter and one from the remarkable man she chose as her life-mate. How do two small cells transform themselves into organs as diverse as lungs, kidneys, a liver, and a brain?

Despite the improvements in the status of children in two thousand years, Riley's Mom and Dad still exercise significant power over his life. They don't consider him their property, however! Instead, they have read extensively about how to serve Riley, preparing him to be a contributor to our society. They realize that their influence will shape his values and beliefs, which will affect everything he does.

As I considered how I might encourage and inspire the leaders who read this week's article, all these thoughts swirled in my head. I remembered a sermon I heard several years ago regarding the power of Jesus and how he chose to use it.

In John 13, Jesus had gathered his disciples for his final meeting with them before his crucifixion. It was his last opportunity to influence this small group of men he had mentored for three years. In verse 3, "Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power."

As a leader, you also have power. How do you use it? Could Jesus serve as a role model for you?

How did Jesus handle this interesting assembly of those who looked to him for direction? Jesus chose to serve them. And after he served them, he asked, "Do you understand what I have done for you?" He paused for them to consider the question. He then answered, "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you....As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

How do you serve and love those you influence? Have you considered that kind of supportive attention to your direct reports to be a major portion of your job description?

If your approach to leadership is something like "I give the orders and my team does the work," you may have a hard time imagining how you could serve your team members. Yet I believe that the strongest leaders have that kind of routine perspective. Allow me to provide some possibilities.

As leader, you provide opportunities, resources, a healthy work environment, and clear expectations. You communicate an inspiring vision. When problems arise, you listen and collaborate to eliminate obstructions and obtain needed resources.

You offer coaching, feedback, respect, and expanded responsibilities. You provide encouragement, hope, balance, and clarity. You tell the truth. You plan ahead so last minute requests rarely occur. You keep promises that you've made. You ask people what they need and you work to provide it.

You may respond to the previous two paragraphs with "Oh, I do all that!" Would your team members agree with you? Do they feel served on a daily basis by your interactions with them?

What would your direct reports tell me if I asked, "What could your boss start doing or stop doing to help you be more effective in your work?"

You don't need me to do that, you know. After all, you have the power to ask that question yourself. Wouldn't that be an interesting way to start the new year?