

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



468 Maybe Mom was Wrong When She Said to “Fit In”

I received a lot of great advice from my mom as I grew up. However, there was one piece of wisdom that may have actually hurt me, rather than helped. I’m Jerry Roberts and today, we look back on that advice. How do I feel about it now? That’s next on The Extra Point.

The first time I remember hearing it was just before I enrolled in junior high, what they call middle school now. It was the 7th grade and there were so many rumors about how the 9th graders treated the younger students. Scary stuff, none of it true, yet we didn’t know that. When I told my mom about what I’d heard she dismissed it, saying I’d be fine and then those words: “Jerry, just try to fit in.” Did you ever hear those words from a parent, that you should just try to “fit in”?

On the surface it’s not bad advice. We all want to be accepted and find our place. This is a common theme throughout life. We want to be a part of things. School, sports, church, service clubs, professional organizations, military service, hobbies, politics, and on it goes. We join things and want to fit in. After all, if you’re not in then you’re out. That is, on the outside, looking in. Who wants that?

Here’s the thing, conformity is a safe thing. Nobody bothers you much, you don’t take many risks, and you’re one of many. You can blend in with others. There’s little or nothing to distinguish you from the crowd.

In college I was conservative. The military was all about conformity. When I got into private employment I was encouraged to be a team player, to do my job in a specific way, to get on and stay on the same page with my coworkers. Do my job the way the boss laid it out, don’t make waves, conform.

In my work as a trainer, coach, and consultant, I see organizations that say they want people to step up and be different, yet there is a

definite undercurrent that pushes conformity and avoids risk.

At a leadership event much like the recently completed Live2Lead, author and speaker Tom Peters forever changed the way I see this issue. He said organizations that will win the future will not just encourage but will demand a diversity of opinion. He advised his clients that when they set up their strategic planning meetings, they include the best and brightest minds in the organization — which should include, in Peters’ words, “a couple of freaks.”

When you use the word “freaks” it can make some people uncomfortable, that you’re making fun of people or judging them harshly. Peters means no harm as he sees these folks in a totally positive light.

These could be people who dress differently, listen to strange music, have unique hobbies, and don’t exactly “fit in” with everybody else. They see the world in ways that “normal” people don’t, which is why he wants them in the conversation. They see up when you see down. They go left when everybody else says to go right.

Peters said these so-called “freaky people” have the potential to produce ideas nobody else will, and that can lead to breakthroughs. So who are the freaky people where you work? Think about engaging them in some of the important projects in your organization. You may find yourself glad they don’t exactly fit in.

That’s The Extra Point. Get out there and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I’m Jerry Roberts.

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