

# The Extra Point

BY JERRY ROBERTS



## # 1033 The Day They Criticized Einstein for a Simple Mistake

Imagine that you are universally recognized as one of the smartest people on the planet. Then, you make a simple error in a public setting, and you are ridiculed for it. I saw a post about this and it brought up an old memory and thoughts about how we treat each other. I'm Jerry Roberts and that's next, on The Extra Point.

Recently, I caught a post that told the story of Albert Einstein, a certifiable genius, and how he made an intentional error in a classroom, to see what the reaction would be.

Einsten wrote on a chalkboard:

$9 \times 1 = 9$   
 $9 \times 2 = 18$   
 $9 \times 3 = 27$   
 $9 \times 4 = 36$   
 $9 \times 5 = 45$   
 $9 \times 6 = 54$   
 $9 \times 7 = 63$   
 $9 \times 8 = 72$   
 $9 \times 9 = 81$   
 $9 \times 10 = 91$

The class erupted in laughter, with students calling out Einstein for error. The correct answer to  $9 \times 10$  isn't 91, of course. It's 90. All of his students were in an uproar over what they thought was a genuine mistake.

Einstein waited for everyone to be silent and said: "Despite the fact that I analyzed nine problems correctly, no one congratulated me. But when I made one mistake, everyone started laughing. This means that even if a person is successful, society will notice his slightest mistake."

I flashed back to my Algebra 1 class in school. I'm definitely no Einstein, but things clicked for me in that class. I connected with the teacher, and the learning was effortless. Two-thirds the way through the semester, I had a perfect score of 100 in tests, quizzes, and assignments, plus I

had never missed on problems given in class. I was excited about that, but I never made a big deal about it. In fact, I don't think I ever mentioned it to anyone but my mom.

The teacher highlighted my achievement one day, and the recognition felt good, but a bit awkward. I wasn't seeking attention, and certainly didn't understand how me being singled out might play with my classmates.

My perfect string came to an end on a day that I allowed myself to be distracted. I was given a problem and must not have heard it clearly because I was yapping with someone. In any case, I missed it.

The teacher announced my mistake like a gameshow host, "No-ho-ho-ho, Jerry, that's not correct!" The class broke up in laughter. I was embarrassed. Worse, it was clear to me they were happy I blew the answer, and that just seemed weird.

The class clown, chimed in with, "Dude, you're such a loser."

Was it jealousy? Was it they felt a need to pull me off this pedestal the teacher had put me on?

It was confusing because I never had any jealousy for other people who achieved. Good for them. I just want some for me.

I've seen this same kind of thing play out in the workplace, and it's led me to wonder what's in it for people who drag others down, or point out mistakes almost gleefully?

I've had people admit to me that they were glad when a certain person screwed up, even if it hurt the organization.

(Con't.)

We'll never get rid of this, of course, but I think we can do more to encourage less of it.

In my course, Recognition, Praise, and Motivation, I highlight the importance of giving praise on a regular basis, and such praise has to be sincere and specific. There's more to it, but that gives you an idea of the concept.

It's okay to single out your star workers for their achievements, but make sure everybody gets fed.

If you say that there's nothing to praise some of your workers for, I'd ask are you looking close enough? The second question is, if what you say is true, why are they on your payroll?

I can't recall having a worker for whom I couldn't find some reason to pump them up. Look harder, it's almost certainly there.

Be a strengthener of strengths...be a praiser for effort and achievement...be a dispenser of enthusiasm.

Last thing. If you are a regular achiever and then mess one up — which brings the laughter and ridicule — go ahead and laugh with them.

It may change the mood from one where, "Ha ha, I'm glad he blew it, he deserves what he's getting"...to "Oh, well maybe he's not such a bad guy after all."

Then, shake it off and go win some more.

That's the Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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