

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



1075 Life and Work are Participation Sports

Today, we talk about being involved, about participation. I have a few ideas to share, and then we have the thoughts of folks who have spoken about the topic. I'm Jerry Roberts, and that's next, on The Extra Point.

Our first invitations to participate in activities will often come at family events. Parents grab our hands and lead us as we waddle out to take part in finding Easter eggs, or some game at Christmas or a birthday party.

Later, we're encouraged to play with the other children in kindergarten, first grade, and so on. After that, it's soccer, baseball, Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts, various clubs at school, and the number of options for involvement would make anyone dizzy. We are programmed to participate from an early age.

Some kids don't take to that message, and the desire to avoid all this is likely stronger for them than the desire for the others to jump in.

Kids who get used to not participating often become adults who shun involvement. I had a conference with a manager recently. And was told of team members who stayed mostly silent in meetings. It took a considerable effort to get them to respond. One of the thoughts expressed was that maybe they weren't all that social.

Participation in the workplace is not about giving in to social expectations. It's about actively making a contribution to the group, a contribution they are equipped to make.

Why then do so many people get nervous and even avoid being lured into a group setting where there is at least some expectation that they will provide value to the group?

Fear. It's the fear of making a mistake, making a fool out of oneself, wasting our time, and them basically having a bummer of a time.

If you've got anyone like this on your team and you want to get them involved, I suggest you start small — literally. Bring them into small meetings and conferences of just a few people. If they survive that, you can then try the larger groups. I've seen this practice succeed, and I believe it's worth a try.

For now, I've found a short list of quotations that deal with the issue of participation.

"Do more than belong: participate. Do more than care: help. Do more than believe: practice. Do more than be fair: be kind. Do more than forgive: forget. Do more than dream: work."

— Inspirational writer William Arthur Ward

"We don't have to engage in grand, heroic actions to participate in the process of change. Small acts, when multiplied by millions of people, can transform the world."

— Historian and political science professor, Howard Zinn

"If there is no freedom of expression, then the beauty of life is lost. Participation in a society is not an artistic choice, it's a human need."

— Contemporary artist Ai Weiwei

"Openness and participation are antidotes to surveillance and control."

— Critic Howard Rheingold

"An athlete gains so much knowledge by just participating in a sport. Focus, discipline, hard work, goal setting and, of course, the thrill of finally achieving your goals. These are all lessons in life."

— Olympic figure skating champion, Kristi Yamaguchi

(Con't.)

"Democratic elections alone do not remedy the crisis of confidence in government. Moreover, there is no viable justification for a democratic system in which public participation is limited to voting."
— Technology professor Beth Simone Noveck

"It takes committed, high energy, full-tilt boogie participation to have the kind of life you want."
— Social Scientist Nicholas Lore

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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