Lessons learned from children

There are some days I can't imagine what Jesus was thinking when he told his disciples they should be like the little children.

Children get everything dirty. Their hands seem always to be sticky. They wake you up at the crack of dawn, yet cry about going to sleep at night. They write on walls and sneak "pet" caterpillars into the house.

But despite all that, Jesus said that unless we become like children, we will never enter the kingdom of Heaven. Alright, I suppose I can understand what he meant. There is something incomparable to the innocence of a child.

Frequently I witness that amazing quality in the children I care for, and every once in a while it's so remarkable, I just can't stop thinking about that moment.

Just the other day, I was enjoying a lovely day off of work. I'm sure everyone can relate to that day. It had been a long week on the job, I was dead tired, and by the time the weekend came around, I could hardly get out of bed, let alone make myself look decent.

I threw on the first clothes I saw, grabbed my things and headed to my refreshing getaway destination of choice: the beach.

Since moving to Texas, I've spent a ridiculous amount of time at the city beach. I don't go there to swim; I just like the view and the fresh air. Even throughout the winter, I'd throw on a sweatshirt and enjoy the empty beach while the true Texans stayed bundled up inside.

The beach is the place I go to be alone with a good book or some music, so I generally keep to myself. That day off was no different, so I wasn't too concerned with the fact that I looked like a total bum, wearing a holey tie dye shirt and sporting unwashed hair.

Imagine my surprise when an unexpected voice broke into my bubble, and I realized my antisocial behavior didn't actually prevent the other people in a public location from seeing me.

It took me a moment to come out of the fantasy world of my book, but once I did, I focused on an adorable 3-year-old standing in the sand.

Having strayed a few feet from her parents, she asked what my name was. I answered, still uncertain about her apparent disregard for my sloppy appearance. Satisfied with my answer, she turned to run toward the water. She called out to me, "I like your pretty shirt," and with that, she was gone as quickly as she had come.

Since then, I cannot get that moment out of my head. I'm so used to judgment as the first instinct, I was caught totally off guard by someone—a child—who was willing to talk to a most unappealing, unwelcoming stranger. Not to mention, her words were spoken to deliver a compliment.

I'm guilty as anyone of prematurely judging others. In fact, I've noticed lately I do it even more often than I thought. I judge based on accents, cars, clothes, hair, you name it.

More often than not, I'm content to just ignore those around me when I could easily offer encouraging words, compliments or at least a smile.

Starting now, I want to be more like that little girl on the beach. I want to give people a chance. It seems to me the world could learn a valuable lesson from the children all around us. Life is more fun when you don't make hasty judgments about others. After all, for all you know, that bum on the beach may very well be a fun, friendly gal, simply relaxing on her day off.

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