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Empathy not judgment.

Recently, one of the things I've been working really hard on in my life is to come from a place of empathy and not a place of judgment, with people that just drive me crazy. We all have them. Those few people in our lives that for whatever reason are just not a good fit to be in our space. We allow them to make us nuts! It could be a family member or relative, it could be an in-law, or for camp's purposes, it could be an employee or parent of a camper. For years I used to let those people drive me up a wall... until recently.

A good friend of mine and I got together recently and were talking a lot about the things that other people do that bothered us. I was going on and on about some mundane thing that a co-worker was doing and he said "You know, I used to be a lot like that and sometimes I still am, but I've learned to not judge people anymore and to try to come from a place of empathy with the person as opposed to passing judgment on them. The most important part of this is not mistaking empathy for pity. We're not feeling bad for someone or feeling sorry for them, rather, we're looking at all the factors in the person's life and reflecting on the fact that, those person's character traits, like most of ours, are formed from the person's life experiences. If someone is particularly unfriendly or unkind, there has got to be a good reason for it. It goes back to one of my favorite quotes... "Mean dogs have mean owners." There is a reason why a person is the way they are, good, bad, or indifferent. By trying to recognize that and really understand that, I've found that it makes those people a lot easier to work, live, and be with.

I'm certainly not perfect by any means and I still fall into the trap of letting those people get to me, but I know that as long as we're trying to keep in perspective what that other person may or may not have going on in their life, it will help make us a better mom/dad, husband/wife, son/daughter, and certainly will help us be a better leader of people.

All the best for a great holiday season!

Steve