

"Writing the truth
as I see it;
trying not to
offend
those who will
disagree."

The truth as I see it[®]

Idaho Common Sense[®]



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Gratitude is a burden

May 10, 2010

"Men are more ready to repay an injury than a benefit because gratitude is a burden and revenge a pleasure."

*Tacitus, 56 AD – 120 AD
Roman historian*

Does this sound a bit too much like today, suggesting we may have progressed little this past 2,000 years? Is gratitude still a burden? Is revenge still a pleasure? Is complimenting difficult? Is complaining easy?

Think of the signs in stores pointing to the customer service department, the successor to the original complaint department. Have you ever seen a sign for a compliment department? I haven't, and even if they existed I doubt people would stand in line waiting to offer a compliment.

Maybe we do better in restaurants. How often do we complain if the service is poor? More important, how often do we compliment when the service is good? Do we want the answers to these questions?

What about the business world? Maybe we do better there. Businesses do put a lot of effort and resources into teaching and getting staff to complement one another, even providing drop boxes with forms designed to compliment fellow workers. Nevertheless, we need no reminders to point out when something is wrong. Speaking for myself, I know I can see what's wrong much more quickly than I

can see what's right. Does complimenting require more effort than complaining?

Needing a real-life example, a few weeks ago I became my own good "bad" example. My wife and I had some difficulty with a business I believed had treated us unfairly. Anticipating the worst-case outcome, I prepared a letter of complaint to the owner. But, before I could even proof the letter, my wife received a call outlining how they wanted to deal with our concerns.

I was excited when she told me what happened but disappointed with my response. In my excitement I said, "Now I don't need to send a letter to the owner." But I should have added, "Instead, I am going to send a letter describing how well his staff solved the problem." And adding insult to injury, I didn't even realize my oversight until I sat down to work on this column. I was quick to revenge, slow to gratitude.

Is retaliation easier than repaying a kindness? Is revenge easier than gratitude? Is complaining easier than complimenting? I suspect our answers to most of these questions leave us uncomfortable. But maybe that's just the way we are and we have no choice.

Not necessarily. Years ago, when I was the team physician for Highland High School athletes, I watched a coach deal with his quarterback on the sidelines. The

quarterback made a dumb mistake during a critical game.

The coach motioned the quarterback off the field and I waited for what I assumed would be a lot of hollering. But there was none. Instead, the coach put his arm around his quarterback and walked him away from the sidelines saying, "You're doing a great job out there. Let's talk about that last play and what we might do differently next time."

Where did he learn that? Grade school. Remember grade school? I know that coach must have learned more in grade school than most of us. It was a wonderful time; teachers dwelled and thrived on telling us what we did right. They were masters of positive feedback, intuitively knowing how to get us excited to do more and to do better.

Remember the stars the teachers drew or stuck on our papers? I know I got lots of stars I didn't deserve. More important, I can't remember why I got the stars; all I remember is how great the stars made me feel.

Now that we are "grownups," how often do we get stars? More telling, how often do we give stars? Are the answers disappointing?

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