

“Meet people where they are” and “Seek first to understand then to be understood”

These are two quotes that I have been concentrating on throughout the weekend. The reason I have reflected and meditated on these words is the fact that I haven't been living up to my own philosophy that these words depict.

In my paranoia, I have been very critical with those that do not understand me. I have concentrated on the fact that I want some to react to me in certain ways and I want some type of validation from them. I have skipped the thought process of “Seek first to understand, then to be understood”. There are some that will never understand where I am coming from – where my thought process originates and why I react the way I do to some things. This does not mean that they are hateful; it simply means they cannot get to that place of common understanding, therefore how could they react the way that I might hope? While I have been busy judging them for their indifference or perceived judgment, I threw out another one of my philosophies... “Meet people where they are”.

With over 6.5 billion people on this earth and every single one of us different, I have never met a person (and I have met many throughout the world) that I could not find a common thread with. Even if it wasn't a healthy thread, I found one. It is important to find within yourself and in others, something that you can relate to – when you do this, judgment becomes very difficult. When you meet a homeless person, it only takes the removal a few elements of your life events to realize – “I could be them”. I don't care who you are... it only takes the removal of a few elements. The same goes with nearly everything and everyone you ever meet – Good and Bad, if you define people that way.

If some cannot relate to me like I wish or hope that is not an attack on me as a person. It is my responsibility to find the common thread that they can relate to and they still may not relate. Sometimes, that is simply love or family – that is all they have to give. You must “Meet people where they are” and that is the place that they have in your life – you cannot expect more than they are willing to give or capable of giving.

This can be very difficult at times. At least with myself, I get very confused by the reactions or the indifference by some people. That old paranoia slips in and then my head is off to the races with all types of bad information. It even overwhelms what I think to be a very keen intuition that I have.

All of our lives are very different. I have talked with so many with mental illness and in the book Harrison's Story there was an interchange between Harrison and the narrator (Mason) that I have gone back and reread this past week that I will share with you.

Mason: *Harrison, your life has been much different than those around you, those with whom you grew up with and those you have worked with. How do you reconcile that constant comparison?*

Harrison: *Well, Mason – you are quite perceptive. This comparison, as it were, has often been difficult for me. It is important to realize, however, I was different before I was diagnosed, I was always different than those around me – I saw the world differently and always felt as though I was judged (whether or not I was, I don't know) with how I saw things. I don't see things in limits, like most. Even medicated – I don't see anything as limited. I don't see people as good or bad. I see no relevance in that because we are all good and bad – it is in us and the definition of good and bad is subjective to say the least. I do see people as different, no doubt – we all are. If you are on the highway and all the sudden you come up to a detour... The detour will be 50 miles out of your way, the road is not paved, it has water, it has rocks and it has hills to climb and you are in an old gremlin... what do you do? Some will simply turn around and go home and say, "We will do that another day". Some will just sit there and stare as if somehow by thinking about it – the scenario will change and some, like me, won't hesitate – they will take the detour. By the time I get to my destination, the road might have been fixed and someone that had gone home and come back, might even beat me to the destination – but I don't care, the detour was an adventure, it was a challenge and what I learned and experienced on the way can never be translated to those that took the new highway.*

Mason: *That could be construed as careless, couldn't it?*

Harrison: *Those that have taken the highway and the safety that it provides in life may have a more comfortable experience and I applaud them for doing so. However, great art that we see today, great sky scrapers, sculptures and literature were never created by anyone that took the highway. The highway does not provide the experiences necessary to deepen your knowledge of life. You can drive through the Rocky Mountains on I-80 and see wonders of nature, but get off the highway and you will be astounded. I like to be astounded.*

It is important that we meet people where they are because not one is more than the other – just different and when you look behind the actions that people take in their lives, you see a different paradigm that generally explains – “why”. When you first seek to understand, you then have a much more realistic position to be understood. I understand why one might take the highway, I would never consider it, but I understand why – therefore I can't judge it, just accept and understand why and meet them, where they are. I don't need to change my point of view or my position in life, I simply need to understand another's point of view and meet them – where they are.