

Break the Fear of Being First

I was watching my son's first robotics competition, and a young woman spoke. I didn't catch her name, but her words were inspiring.

"If you are the first in any area, it is scary because there is no model for you to follow."

This parallels my recent thoughts on risk aversion. It is ingrained in us to avoid things that might cause us harm. And, if we can't see a solid landing, we don't go forward. It is like we want to climb trees, but we want someone to show us where to put our hands and feet, and then we will get to the top. But what happens when you are the first? You need a different set of skills. We learn to identify levels of risk instead of looking for a sure thing.

My children seem to be particularly low on the risk aversion scale. They all were climbing trees by age 2. Therefore, we had a rule: 'nobody helps anybody climb'—because (my theory went) 'if you can get up on your own, you will know how to find your way back down.'

So, now I am thinking through how this might apply to gatekeepers. What if gatekeepers are just the older kids in the tree? What if we stop waiting for someone to show us how they got up there, and just shimmy on up on our own?

Here is another thing that young lady said this morning:

"If you see an area where you feel underrepresented in leadership, then step up and be the first."

This is great food for thought. Often we hear what "someone" should do—and again, it is often focused on what the gatekeepers should do. However, I have heard from good authority that the real reason that gatekeepers don't open the

gate to more women is because when they are looking for someone to fill a spot, no woman is there. I imagine the same is true for every underrepresented group, whether gender, race or age related.

Maybe we need to just be the first, step out and do what God called us to. If you are already in the tree when the big kids need someone to be on their side, you will be the one they pick.

When my youngest was seven, she decided to have a lemonade stand. If you know this child, you know that the wind would dare not blow if she told it not to. She is a force of nature. She set up her lemonade stand at the end of the driveway, made lemonade, and started selling. But traffic wasn't stopping. So, she marshaled all her siblings and two kids from across the street to wave signs for her. Pretty soon she sold so much that she ran out of lemonade. When I got home, I kind of messed it up for her because I pointed out that she had an entire workforce that were working for free. That was her first lesson in labor relations. When they realized they should be getting more than a cup of lemonade for their troubles, they went on strike.

Here is the thing—that child has never waited for someone else to open the door for her. If need be, she just changed the tree so that people started climbing after her.

Where are you at today? Are you waiting for someone to show you where to put your feet? Are you waiting for the big kids to invite you into the tree? Can you see a path that no one else has seen, but it would require you to climb on your own and invite others for the adventure?

Do what God has called you to do—even if it means you have to be first.

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