

Date Written: 11-26-2004

## **Understanding the Value of Laws, Rules, and Regulations**

I have been considering value systems and the development of rules, regulations, and laws in which people follow in the general sense, and also in regards to the familial environment. It is my belief that the vast majority of individuals in this country, regardless of the context, obey laws and regulations due not to the understanding and agreement to the necessity and value of them, but rather due to the fear of consequence and punishment if caught violating those laws and/or regulations, or the guilt associated with disregard towards them.

### **A Starting Point**

One of the most obvious examples that lends support for my argument is traffic laws, its enforcement, and drivers disregard for them. The values of our current traffic laws are very real, and it is amazing to me that so many of us fail to understand them. Signaling, obeying the speed limit, complete stops at stop signs, stopping at red lights, seat belts, keeping off of cell phones while driving, and so on all exist for our own safety as well as those around us. They were not created to be a nuisance and hassle for us, but are in place rather for our own protection and safety and the safety of those around us. For instance, by signaling we spend a mere second to allow other drivers to know our intentions on the road, and perhaps avoid a preventable accident instead of changing lanes at will and potentially creating a safety hazard.

### **Rules Provide a Safety Net**

If we understand the value in keeping ourselves, our families, and our neighbors' safe, we follow these simple and really not so inconvenient rules. The value in these laws can be equated to the value we assign to human life, or respect of life, and our ability to realize it is never our right to endanger another person.

Those of us on the other hand, who fail to realize the importance of such laws, feel that we are being hassled, and inconvenienced by having to drive anything less than 75 mph, regardless if we are driving in 50 mph zone. We fail to realize that these laws are in place for the safety of the community, and rather think that it is personally directed towards us. We fail to realize our own limitations, our own vulnerability, and potential to behave in ways that are truly unsafe and can lead to not only our own injury or death, but also to those around us. This example can also be generalized into many other contexts, from rules in educational settings, behavior in relationships, the work environment, and also, perhaps most importantly, in the family environment.

## **Values in the Family Environment**

It is in regards to the context of family values, I wish to discuss next. Parents may enforce certain rules in their households; these rules are enforced so strictly at times that they are very effective in discouraging open disobedience, or even at times disobedience of these rules in any significant way, but the rules of the household very infrequently generalize to life outside of the family setting. This is due to the inability of the children to understand the value of the rules established by the parents, or even perhaps the lack of explanation ever provided for the children on why these rules exist, and how they actually protect the children and are in their best interests to follow. These are the children that grow up and enter college behaving as though they were just set free of a sort of oppressive regime and are now free to live life with total disregard of consequences; for example, engaging in promiscuous activities, placing themselves in dangerous, sometimes criminal situations, and the exploration of many mind altering substances.

### **The Value of Rules**

If these individuals understood the true value; the ethical, moral underpinnings and reasoning behind the rules established since their childhood in their family, and externally by the legal system, perhaps they would perhaps refrain from much of the behavior that runs rampant in today's society. There is a necessity that from an early age we teach our future generations that rules do not merely exist, but exist for a purpose that benefits their own interests, and the interests of those we care about, and that they have inherent value that supersedes any slight inconveniences we incur as a result of submitting to behavior that provides for not only the greater good, but for ourselves.

### **A Lost Society**

We have turned into a society that will at times attempt to get away with anything if no one is looking, and if caught, lack the character to take responsibility for our own actions; to lie, say almost anything to avoid the consequences and "get into trouble." I find it very disappointing that so many of us seem to lack the ability to develop a true understanding of values and principles; the inability to set standards for ourselves and then follow through on them. We live in a very self-centered, self-serving, pleasure oriented world, without a clear path to take to place us back on the right path.

I realize that to some this discussion may have appeared slightly simplistic, and it is not meant to put the blame of every social concern in existence today on the shoulders of those who disregard laws and rules. It is merely an important piece in the puzzle, and perhaps can cause a mere few of us to stop and consider the importance and value our laws that we have in place, and other rules and guidelines established in family, employment, and social situations.