
New Kid On the Block

Series: Part 1

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Remember how that was? Being the new kid on the block? Trying to establish yourself in a new neighborhood, a new company, a new department? How the look on everyone's face seemed to ask the question, "Who is this guy?"

The answers to that question take many forms. Some have to do with character, some with competence, and others with various social skills. Some can be answered with a single action; when the new kid is knocked off his or her bike by the neighborhood bully and gets up and pokes the bully in the nose, everyone learns immediately that the new kid is not to be taken lightly.

There is a cautionary adage that recommends that not every opportunity to fight should be taken, that would be a form of recklessness, but that one should choose their fights depending on the importance of the issue involved and the likelihood of success. The adage is a useful tonic when tempted by annoying but inconsequential provocations. But there is another side to the coin, some fights should be fought even though one knows going in that one is going to lose. These fights are over moral and ethical values.

But back to our new kid on the block; there he or she is, the wrong gender, the wrong color, the wrong accent, the wrong something or other. She doesn't fit in. He is not us. Still we have a wonderful capacity for inclusion; we can overlook issues as long as we can find a compelling reason to bring the newcomer into the fold. In the example above, the response to bullying is perceived as an admirable quality, representing a kind of person worth having in the group. It is not dependent on fighting skill but on the willingness to stand up for oneself. Or by extension for the group.

This is not a recommendation to stand up in a meeting and poke the meeting bully in the nose. Tempting as that may be. But the principle underlying the response is the same. Your proposal has been dismissed without due consideration. Why? You have done your homework, your supporting facts and data are relevant, the strategic fit has been taken into account, the opportunity is fleeting and resources and immediate action are required. Time to take a deep breath. What other factors are you not considering? Is the failure to persuade in the proposal or in you? Is it a matter of trust or a business issue? Business issues need to be addressed with business answers. Trust issues relate to character and competence.

Trust does not travel well. A player from a Super Bowl team being traded to your team is a matter for both enthusiasm and skepticism. Yes, he played a role in winning the Super Bowl. So why did they trade him to us? What did they see that we do not? And so the new guy has to begin again to demonstrate, on and off the field, how he contributes to your team. Trust is a renewable resource.

More about the new kid on the block next time.