

Can We Rise above the Emotions?

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With all of the self-help groups available, there ought to be one for the parents of teenagers. For those that haven't had the pleasure, teenagers bring a unique level of madness into a previously stable environment.

Let me give you an example. Shortly after my eldest son got his driver's license (at the questionable age of 16), his error in judgment resulted in his first automobile accident. Even though our car was destroyed, he was (thank God) relatively untouched (nothing our chiropractor couldn't take care of).

Throughout the event I kept my cool, being understanding and showing concern for his well-being. After the usual father-son talk about safety, responsibility, and caution, he was encouraged to get back in the driver's seat, now all the more wiser.

The next evening he demonstrated a new sense of maturity when he volunteered to drive one of his younger brother's friends home. As they left, my wife and I blissfully imagined the many errands he would run for us in exchange for the use of the car. Peace and tranquility seemed to settle back into the Petersen household.

About 20 minutes later, the phone rang. I instantly had a presentiment of foreboding, and my stomach felt as if someone had just hit me -- hard. I suspected who was on the phone and feared what the call was about.

"This had better be good news," I said.

"It's not," my son intoned. He began to recount the story of a four-car freeway pile-up. His car was hit from the side by a third car in an accident one lane over. Even though it was not in any way his fault, it was our only remaining vehicle.

At that point I lost control of my emotions. Without even asking about his well-being, I proceeded to yell at him about the loss of the car. Most of what I said I really didn't mean. I was overwrought and my son was bearing the brunt.

Because of the complexity of the accident and the police reports, he was not home for several hours. When he arrived, we had much to talk about. He was unharmed. The other plus was that the car was still driveable.

Now it was my turn to apologize. I had lost perspective. He was just a kid in the midst of a learning process, trying to do his best.

My reaction to my son's second accident got me thinking about how many chiropractors react to the unfair portrayals of our profession by the media. Years ago, it was unusual for chiropractic or chiropractors to be mentioned in the media, and when we were, it was sure to be in complete derision. The results of the Wilk antitrust trial went largely unnoticed, because most reporters, editors, and journalists didn't know what chiropractic was. Beyond our patients, we didn't even

exist in the minds of the public.

Through various efforts by our national associations, state associations, chiropractic colleges, and individual DCs, chiropractic currently holds a presence in the public eye. Over time, many journalists have had some kind of exposure to chiropractic. Not only does chiropractic make the news, but the mention of chiropractors can even be seen in various advertisements.

Years ago, it was strictly taboo to admit you saw a chiropractor. Now, it is not only acceptable, but a symbol of health consciousness transcendent of traditional medicine.

Even so, we read the occasional articles that question the benefits of chiropractic, and accuse DCs of being less than honorable. First you get mad. You take it personally; you want to retaliate. You write the nastiest letter imaginable. You question the author's motives and parentage. You feel better now, but not good enough. You might be satisfied if your letter was reprinted in full, followed by an unconditional apology from the author, editor, publisher and all the advertisers.

A few days later (or minutes, if you faxed or e-mailed it), the author sits reading your letter. Despite some chiropractors' beliefs, the person reading your letter is not an agent for the AMA. This is simply a person who doesn't understand chiropractic's value or how it could benefit him.

With the exception of Ron Slaughter, your letter is the only contact the author has had with a chiropractor. Your letter has just convinced the author that everything Slaughter said (and they printed) was true.

It will be years before the author ever listens to anything positive about chiropractic again. His retaliation to your letter will be to continue reporting the worst about chiropractic, and keeping thousands of patients an arm's length away from chiropractic.

Perhaps you over-reacted. The author may just be another skeptic, who, approached by a DC in personal and professional manner, could begin to understand the value of chiropractic. Perhaps you could have been that DC. Just like the skeptical husband/wife, they need someone to be understanding of their doubts and take the time to teach them.

Difference of opinion is what makes life interesting; winning people over makes life challenging. There are so many people ready to become patients if we can just reach out to them at their level of understanding. Can we rise above the anger we may feel and respond in a manner that clearly demonstrates the compassionate nature of chiropractic?

Perhaps it's time to regain our perspective and see all people (even highly opinionated journalists) as patients.

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