

Why Isn't (S)he More Like Me?

Dr. Ron Kaiser January 23, 2014 No Comments

Why Isn't (S)he More Like Me? (Transcription)

Hi everybody this is Dr. Ron Kaiser with your September 2012 podcast from the Mental Health Gym. This podcast is being recorded shortly after the end of the Republican and democratic presidential conventions in the United States. I know most of our listeners are from the US although I suspect that others of you from outside this country have watched our political events with some interest. The recently completed conventions have reflected a trend that has been going on both in this country and throughout the world in recent years. That trend has been polarization.

It seems like whether we're talking about political parties, religions, socioeconomic classis and other kinds of things that there seems to be kind of a real us against them mentality as opposed to a mentality of cooperation. In my field related to psychology and medicine, we find that very often the polarization may occur between those of us in the health care providing field and some of the attorneys who tend to make the living suing for malpractice.

So it seems like again we all seem to have certain, for one of the better term is, enemies, and there seems to in many cases be a real antipathy, almost a hatred for the other side. Now some of us are old enough to remember that it wasn't always that way. I'm not sure why it changed but I have some guesses. First of all the proliferation of cable TV channels now makes it possible for somebody to come home from work, turn on a particular channel that favors a political party or another and listen, keep it on that channel all evening and not hear an opposing viewpoint which makes for the assumption that there is one absolute correct viewpoint and the other one is wrong.

I think that the fact that we're in a very difficult economy, that's been going on for too long, makes it very easy to try to look for somebody to blame. Despite the fact that we have bad economic conditions going on throughout the world, so there's no doubt that the blame is shared, and this kind of polarization seems to have taken on a life of its own so that when people get particular points of view, they tend to defend it, while hosing their minds to the possibility that somebody else may have a valid opposing point of view.

Now I have a problem with that because I think there's so much of human growth and development, both in terms of the humanities and the sciences has occurred because of the fact that people have tended to cooperate, have tended to be open to various kinds of point of view, even though they may be somewhat contradictory to the points that we feel strongly about. I believe that I'm capable of being a better psychologist than I could have been fifty years ago because there have been all kinds of new discoveries and so on in our field, there've been new theories evolving, there've been new understandings of the human functioning how brain functions, how absorbs information and so on. And as a result if I choose to make use of the knowledge of lots of people, I can be a better psychologist than I can if I rigidly hold to a point of view and I'm not open to other experiences.

In fact I think just generally if we choose the route of polarization I think we can do that without giving up some of our humanity. Human growth and development over the years has largely been dependent upon discoveries and other concepts that have involved cooperation. When people get away from discussing polarized points of view about our country and this was true even in the political conventions, there tended to be a great deal of homage paid to our forefathers of the United States who established a government based upon cooperation and based upon looking at what worked and

didn't work in other places and coming up with some new ideas so that some is greater than the whole.

There is another practical issue involved in that it's a lot more fun to have a cooperative mind set than an overly polarized mindset. Those of us who've been involved in sports know that if you treat a game as something to put forth your best in but to be able to shake hands and be friends with the opposite side once it's over, that makes a lot more than if you're gonna be depressed until the next game because the game that you particularly lost.

In the field of business, in professional affairs and so on, there are professional groups that are people who tend to be in essence opponents in the business world but can pull together around common interests and in fact even when we look at the political world we find that many politicians are able to socialize more effectively with their opponents than sometimes their believers are with other people who hold the opposing point of view.

Some people who follow a particular political belief system, find it incapable of thinking at the side is right is rational, human, capable of being friends, and the reality is you miss out on a whole lot of fun by not being able to tolerate diverse point of view.

Now I'm not suggesting that you shouldn't be passionate about your point. I'm not suggesting that you shouldn't be able to vigorously defend it, I think that's part of the growth experience both personally and in terms of development of new and innovative ideas. Being able to express your opinion, be able to vigorously defend it, be able to not shy away from giving it is essential for the growth of new ideas, but at the same time I think it is very important to not close your mind to the notion that the other person may have something to contribute to.

The appropriate question is not why isn't he or she more like me? The appropriate question is not why aren't they doing what I would be doing if I were them, but the appropriate question is what does this person have to offer? Why is he or she thinking this way? What can I possibly learn from them? That doesn't preclude to coming to a conclusion that says you know from my vantage point, I'm right and they're but I also think it's important to recognize that somebody else doesn't have to be wrong for me to be right. And I just think that's a critical concept, I've actually tweeted it to some of my followers in the past. Somebody else doesn't have to be wrong for me to be right.

I encourage you to think about that and more importantly I encourage you to think in terms of a cooperative, rather the polarized mindset.

I think you'll accomplish more and I think you'll have a lot more fun doing it. This has been Dr. Ron Kaiser with your September 2012 podcast from The Mental Health Gym. As always I'm interested in your feedback and I will look forward to speaking with you again next month.