

The Golden Rule

In America we have policies and societal attitudes that could be considered unfair and/or unjust. The Golden Rule states "Do unto others as you'd have them do unto you," but white American society doesn't really believe in following the Golden Rule. American's have a tendency to be opinionated and pushy, and this tendency saturates our interactions with others all the way up to a governmental level. All one has to do to see this in action is to look at our treatment of members of minority groups, victims of sex crimes, and even our policies in dealing with other countries.

The struggle of the people in minority groups in this country has been a long and exhausting quest for equality. Women are the largest minority group in this country, yet they do not get equal pay for equally difficult jobs. A typical C.N.A., or certified nurse's aide, is required to lift heavy weights on a regular basis, tend to people's physical needs, and often spends a lot of time tending to a lot of people. This typical C.N.A. makes about \$6.00 per hour. A typical construction worker, on the other hand, does work that is equal to or less physically exhausting than the C.N.A. gets paid about \$15.00 per hour at entry level. The amount of training required for each position is about the same and the jobs are about the same level of difficulty. The main differences between these two jobs are: construction brings in more money than nursing, the C.N.A. deals directly with a large number of people's lives and construction does not, construction is a little more dangerous than nursing, and the C.N.A. is typically female where the construction worker is typically male. This inequity in payment can only be explained by the value of money over the value of the worker and the value of men over women in the work force. If we were living by the golden rule, we would consider the value of the worker, regardless of gender, since most of us would prefer to be paid what we are worth.

Another problem of minority group members is that they often have to deal with harassment and unfair treatment from the government. Members of the homosexual community are often the targets of the most blatant discrimination since it is somewhat socially acceptable to treat a homosexual as sub-human or with a lack of compassion. Our government denies homosexuals access to the military. Gay-bashing both physical and mental, unfortunately, is a common activity in this country. Homosexuals deal with this kind of treatment simply because of what they do in the privacy of their own bedrooms. Minority ethnic groups, like blacks, Hispanics and Native Americans, often have to tolerate racial slurs, hate violence and stereotyping; they often find it difficult to make it into the mainstream of our culture and acquire decent jobs just because of skin color. Ethnic groups have earned a sort of "surface equality" after centuries of battling the system; I call it "surface equality" because prejudice and racism are still widespread in this country. Prejudice is the antithesis of the Golden Rule. I don't think anyone wants to experience discrimination in their ability to make a living simply because of their bedroom conduct or skin color, and nobody likes to be called names.

Americans also tend to avoid following the Golden Rule when we deal with victims of sex crimes. It is common to treat the victim as if s/he were to blame for the crime. A rape victim often has to deal with a long, excruciating and humiliating physical exam and then have their sexual history scraped with a fine tooth comb only to be drug out in front of a courtroom audience. The perpetrator often does not have to deal with this, s/he is rarely examined to find

physical evidence of the crime, and his sexual history is often not taken into account. Victims of child molestation are often called to testify in front of the realest monster they have ever seen in their life, yet we expect them to maintain a clear head through their fear. Our lack of respect and empathy for the victims of sex crimes shows that we do not really believe that they didn't invite such treatment. Marital rape is an excellent example of this denial. The whole outrageous mentality seems to be, "How can someone be raped by their spouse? What a ridiculous idea; when one person marries another they give their body and sexuality to each other." -- or something like that. We treat these victims as if their horror and confusion are not real, but most of us wish to be treated as if though our experiences were real.

Victims of certain diseases also get treated poorly in this country. People with mental illnesses, STD's (especially AIDS), and diseases that result from genetic defects are often treated as second class citizens. They are often considered to be at fault in the case of mental illnesses and STD's and therefore not deserving of compassion. People who suffer from schizophrenia often end up living on the streets, eating out of garbage cans, and talking to themselves because institutions often say they do not have the funding or room to care for them. Schizophrenia is a genetic disease; it is not caused by an unwillingness to cope on the part of the victim. There is nothing the victim can do about it. Not only do the mentally ill have to cope with poor support, but for several years, victims of AIDS often had to deal with condemning and degrading remarks in the paper and by their peers. For a long time, getting AIDS often resulted in the person wasting away to die alone with no family or friends to wish him or her farewell. Mental retardation is often a cause for ridicule, also. Many who suffer from it, regardless of its cause, often end up living in a nursing home or special home and never seeing most of their family ever again. This is how we often treat our "less than perfect" members of society. However, it is highly unlikely that any of us would appreciate this treatment if it were to be returned to us. We probably would never consider turning out people who suffer from heart disease or cancer as easily as we do these people.

Not only do we ignore the Golden Rule in our treatment of individuals, but we have problems adhering to it in our treatment of other countries. We often interfere where we are not wanted. We've interfered in various countries like Vietnam, Bosnia, Kuwait and El Salvador. We expect to be left alone on our own soil to live the way we see fit, and we would not tolerate other governments coming here to tell us how to live very well at all. The campaign against Communism several years ago, and its accompanying propaganda are good examples of our, "live and tell others how to live," policy. Just because we believe that Democracy and the "American way" are the best ways to live does not mean that they are. We expect others to respect our way of life, but we often do not do the same for other countries.

American society has a long history of being judgmental of and forcing our beliefs upon others. We do not, however, take kindly to the same treatment when foisted upon us. This is a blatant disregard of the Golden Rule. To be fair, Americans are not the only group of people that do this, but we still do not really believe in obeying it. Our treatment of others has been, at times, grossly unfair and unjust, though I believe it is changing. Perhaps someday, we will actually learn to live by such a simple yet challenging rule, but it will only happen if we start by applying it to our individual lives.

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November 15, 1993