

The Dance of Judgment

By Judge Stanley Peele

Abe was talking to me about a local problem in the criminal justice system; one that had been in the headlines recently.

“Power does not equate to superiority.”

"I'll tell you what is happening here!" he said, "This guy has fouled up, he is in the wrong; I would not trust him any further than I can throw a piano; he needs to be kicked out right now!"

"Don't be too quick to judge," I replied.

His eyes widened. "Oh, you know something about the case, don't you?" he asked.

"Not much," I replied.

"Well then, what's your point?"

"It's philosophical. I try not to judge people," I replied.

"Har, Har!" he exclaimed, "Not judge? Not judge? That's a laugh! You are a judge, yet you try to tell me not to judge?"

"Glad to give you something to laugh at. Now, let's see if I can explain this. A few weeks ago, you fired a member of your crew, didn't you?"

"Yep, replied Abe.

"OK, now, if someone else calls you, asking for a recommendation about him, what will you say?"

"I will recommend that he not be hired, because he will not show up on time, and this throws the crew back, lowers morale."

"After he gets on the job, how hard does he work?" I asked.

"He works hard, works like a horse."

"Then wouldn't you tell him that your man works hard?" I asked.

"Well yeah," said Abe.

"My suggestion is that when you fire a person, that you should not do so from a high position, a position where you are of the opinion that he is a lesser person and that you are a greater person. It should be as equals. A person who can not show up on time is unacceptable to your crew, so you feel you have to fire him. But you do not have to judge him as a person. Do you see?"

"It sounds impossible." he said.

"Agreed," I replied, "But well worth the attempt. Let's put the shoe on the other foot. Let's assume I am holding court and a man is brought before me and pleads guilty to serious charges. I sentence him to prison. Does this make me superior to the defendant? Of course not. No more than Pontius Pilate was superior to Jesus when he sentenced Jesus to death. The prisoner and I are equal. He made his choices. I made my choice. Power does not equate to superiority. Might does not make right."

I continued, "A few weeks ago, while visiting in the hospital, I saw a lady who I had known as a judge. We greeted one another, then she introduced me to a man who was sitting next to her. I had not recognized him. She said, ""You will remember him because he used to have an alcohol problem and wound up before you in court."" Then I remembered him. I had given him jail time."

"Then the man spoke up and said, ""Yes, I remember you. You're OK, you just did not know any better.""

Abe smiled "Pretty funny. I get it. He does not judge you, eh? And I think I get your point. You are saying, **Judge not that ye be not judged.**"

"That's close," I replied, "But my idea is to take that statement another step. **Judge not that ye be not judged** implies that the reason you should not judge is that you shall, in turn, be judged. So, it is a simple give and take: do it so you don't get hurt; it is self-preservation."

"There is another reason not to judge." I continued. It is because that is who you are. That is your nature. It is your nature to be kind to others, and not to judge them. Thus, you fulfill your inner nature, and bring joy to yourself and to your neighbors."

Abe looked at me for a few seconds in silence. Then he said, "Judge, you won't do. You are diagonally parked in a parallel universe!"

"Oh? You think so?" I replied.

"Yes I do. You are as odd as a dancing bear!!"

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