



Education Support

“Discipline is Something You Do For Someone”

By Gardner McCollum, Submitted by Debbie Byrd

Late in the 1988 football season, Coach Lou Holtz's Notre Dame "Fighting Irish" were leading contenders for the National Collegiate Football Championship. The day before a crucial game on the west coast two stand-out players were sent back to Notre Dame because of a rules infraction. Coach Holtz was asked later why he had sent two of his best players home a few hours before such an important game. Coach Holtz replied, "I didn't send them home - they sent themselves home. They knew what the rules were and the penalty for violating the rules. I simply enforced them."

Later, when he was again asked why he took the disciplinary action against the players, Coach Holtz went directly to the heart of the matter when he said, "I never thought of discipline as something that you did to someone, I always thought that discipline is something you did for someone."

Coach Holtz realized that the disciplinary action taken against the players seriously jeopardized their chances of winning the game, but he also knew much more was at stake. Teams and individuals must have discipline if either is to be successful. He was responsible for maintaining the high level of discipline needed to compete successfully at the national level and, more important, to help young men to acquire the self-discipline needed to be successful, personally and professionally.

Every one, every day, is faced with choices and each of us has the free will to decide what our choice will be. However, once the choice is made we cannot escape the consequences of our choices. That is the basis for the Law of Cause and Effect, sometimes referred to as "consequential behavior."

For example, a student who chooses to attend class, pay attention and study will be successful as a student and will receive praise and awards for his/her accomplishments. A student who is absent frequently, daydreams and fails to do his assigned work will find school to be unpleasant and nonproductive.

The principles of consequential behavior are universal, applying to teachers, administrators and parents as well as students. Self-discipline is an acquired behavior learned through the efforts of the important people in our lives. Helping children to

acquire self-discipline often requires great self-discipline by those responsible for teaching it. Enforcing the consequences of undisciplined behavior is a difficult and often unpleasant task which many teachers and parents find easier to ignore. There are, of course, consequences to ignoring enforcement -- a person lacking in self-discipline because he was able to evade the consequences of his behavior.

A few suggestions about helping students to become self-disciplined:

1. Be sure your students understand the Law of Cause and Effect.
2. Be sure your students understand the consequences of decisions.
3. Do not set sanctions that you cannot or will not enforce.
4. Enforce the sanctions each time, every time consistently and fairly. Avoid the temptation not to enforce sanctions because enforcement creates an inconvenience for you or because you feel sorry for the offender.
5. Remember you are helping someone to learn to live with the consequences of their choices.
6. Be self-disciplined yourself.

Helping students to learn self-discipline is a demanding task, especially in a permissive society. It is well worth the effort. It helps to assure that your students will live happy, successful lives long after they have established lives independent from parents and teachers. As Lou Holtz said, "Discipline is something you do for someone."

