

Why Preaching Doesn't Work

If, in preaching to you by newsletter, I told you to eat brown rice and three servings of vegetables and to stop eating fried potatoes and hamburgers, would you do it if you hated brown rice and vegetables and loved me?

If I told you to enjoy protected sex and avoid unprotected sex whether or not you are married, would you if you grew up in a stable catholic neighborhood populated by more men than women?

Would you if there were many more women than men?

Would you if you were a first-born child in the family or a later-born?

I ask these questions to point out that the decisions we make about food and sex, and many other things in our daily lives, come from our subconscious memory banks. Our split second decisions come from our perception of how the situation fits into our memory bank. If a woman grows up in a neighborhood of more women than men, she subconsciously dresses more provocatively than a woman elsewhere so she can compete for the perceived limited supply.

According to a New Zealand study, first-borns are twice as likely to be virgins at 21 than later-borns.

Women who grow up in a fatherless home menstruate at an earlier age than those who don't.

In a recent article for the New York Times David Brooks makes the point that teaching values in public schools doesn't change behavior. Preaching, he says, is based on the idea that humans are primarily deciders when all evidence about human behavior shows that we rarely "use our heads." We react from our attitudes, beliefs and tastes.

If a man grows up in a neighborhood where brown rice and vegetables are common fare, he will happily accept my preaching.

Advertisers know that repetition works, that all purchases are emotional. They also knew that abstinence programs in the schools wouldn't work.

Brooks writes, "Deciding is conscious and individual, but perceiving is subconscious and communal. The teen programs that actually work don't focus on the sex. They focus on the environment teens live in. They work on the substrata of perceptions students use to orient themselves. ...They understand that changing behavior changes attitudes, not the other way around.

"They know that whether it's middle school or Middle East, getting human nature right is really important."

I need to repeat his statement: "Changing behavior changes *attitudes*, not the other way around."

I second that—again and again—and add a dash of self-acceptance to the mix. In other words, high horses kick dust. I'm getting off mine. But try a little spinach salad anyway?

Evy
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