

The Importance of People

Stephen M. Corey

"The substance of this piece," says Mr. Corey, "is exactly what I overheard, so help me!" The two persons who are talking do not see eye-to-eye on the matter in question, and it can hardly be said that the viewpoint of either was altered by the conversation. Yet it is an amazing bit of dialogue. In presenting it here, we leave you the choice of being shocked or unperturbed, as is your mood, or of making a serious effort to understand the problem.

"GETTING DOWN TO CASES"

ARTHUR RACE, at 60, was an unconventional and crotchety Professor of Education. The conversation reported below took place between Prof. Race and one of his devoted students of the class of 1935, ABRAM SCHWARTZ, an earnest and conscientious school administrator. Up until the outburst below Prof. Race had not taken a very vigorous part in the conversation but had divided his attention between Schwartz' remarks and Freud's *Our Culture and Its Discontent*. Finally he put his book down.

Race: Abe, you almost make me ashamed that you were one of my students. All of this palaver about morale and adjustment and such tripe. Why don't you get down to cases? You know what's really troubling some of those women on your staff, don't you?

Schwartz: Why, I don't think anything fundamental is wrong. They're okay. At least my thirteen are: I know they're a bit tense at times and they get their feelings hurt and they cry pretty easily but apart from that . . .

Race: A little bit tense at times, my eye. That one who teaches the fifth grade is as taut as a drumhead most of the time. At least she was during both of the hours when I looked in on her.

Talk about a "conscience personified"—she was it.

Schwartz: Well, I'll admit she is something of a Puritan—has awfully high standards for herself and the children but . . .

Race: I'll bet any money she shows you notes the youngsters write that allude to sex.

Schwartz: Yes, she does, although I've never thought she quite realized the implications of some of the drawings. But that business of dirty notes is a problem with most fifth grade children. They . . .

Race: I'd say it's a problem with most fifth grade teachers. Sex fascinates them but they can only recognize it under the guise of its being bad and

- requiring that something be done.
- Schwartz: I hadn't thought of it quite that way. But the teacher you asked about, though—She . . .
- Race: You let me guess. I'd wager anything that she lives with her mother. So?
- Schwartz: Yes, that's right.
- Race: And that the old lady is sort of crinoline and old-lacy and sweet.
- Schwartz: Well, that's pretty strong, but you don't miss it far.
- Race: Humpf! I'll bet it's not strong but an understatement and the poor daughter probably unconsciously hates her at the same time she calls her "Mama, dear."
- Schwartz: Well, what of it? What's that got to do with morale in general? Maybe she and her mother shouldn't live together; higher salaries would make that sort of thing unnecessary.
- Race: Well, you certainly are a shallow-water diver. You think it's all economic, eh? You think that if you give teachers more money and more security and be sweet to them they'll be good for the children and happy forever after—where are your brains?
- Schwartz: (*Just a bit miffed*) Well, what's *your* big idea? I'm not the only administrator in the world who thinks that teachers' morale would be improved by . . .
- Race: Yes—and you and your brethren are half right, too. Morale *would* be improved if teachers were given more money and treated a little bit less paternalistically. But you fellows haven't put your fingers yet on the real problem.
- Schwartz: Well, go ahead, go ahead and put *your* finger on it. I'll take notes.
- Race: No, I guess you've got to learn for yourself, but I'm going to help. Abe, when I met your staff I liked the third grade teacher a lot.
- Schwartz: She's topnotch! Sort of comfortable and relaxed with the youngsters, doesn't favor any of them particularly, and seems so at ease. I don't see how she does all that she does, either. I've never seen her blow up, but I have noticed that some of the other teachers seem a little jealous and resentful of her.
- Race: You haven't any idea why, eh?
- Schwartz: No.
- Race: Tell me what you meant about her having so much to do.
- Schwartz: Well . . . she has a home to take care of and two children . . . a boy in the Army and a girl in high school. Her husband's the county agent.
- Race: They seem to like one another, do they, she and her husband?
- Schwartz: Yes, I guess so. Come to think of it, they seem to care a lot for one another. He's terribly proud of her. At a P.T.A. meeting several weeks ago where she did a dandy job of presiding, I thought he'd burst. He looked around at everybody and swelled up like a pouter pigeon.
- Race: Well, what does she say about him?
- Schwartz: Oh, he comes into her conversation all the time. They usually go to Florida together for ten days at Christmas and spend the month of August at their place in Estes Park.
- Race: Well, I'm not surprised. I'll bet they're a fine match. What surprises me is that you don't have more insight into the reason for her equanimity.
- Schwartz: Well, if you mean that one

reason she's a good teacher may be because she's married, I guess that's true, but . . .

Race: Well, now, hold on just a minute. That woman who teaches physical education for you . . . she's married, too, isn't she?

Schwartz: Yes.

Race: Well, from what little I've seen of her she seems about as dissatisfied as any of the rest of them—almost on the verge of an emotional upset any minute. Am I right?

Schwartz: Yes, you are.

Race: You know her husband?

Schwartz: Well, only slightly. He's not around very much. He works in Seski and lives there most of the time.

Race: You wouldn't say that there was too much harmony in that home, then. Do you remember that young kindergarten teacher that you lost at the end of last year?

Schwartz: Yes, we all hated to see her go, too, because she was fine. She resigned when she married a young aviator and went to live where he was giving instruction to Air Corps cadets down in Texas.

Race: Have you any idea *why* she did a good job?

Schwartz: No. She seemed very happy, though. I recall almost all spring she literally glowed and liked people and treated the children kindly and . . .

Race: Well, all I can say is that you ought to read some of this author. And when I say read "him" I mean it. Don't read his wacky interpreters. Freud at least wrote about the fundamental problems that nobody else likes to discuss. He recognized that sex *is* a factor in life.

Schwartz: Well, of course, we all

recognize that. But what are you going to do about it? In this culture, teachers just have to learn to live with that problem. Any solution that does not include getting married is no solution at all. What are you going to do?

Race: I'd pass a law—a law that would prohibit all females from teaching school between the ages of 25 and 35. And after 35 the only women who would be employed would be women who had at least one child and who in addition had made a happy and wholesome adjustment to family life. By that I include a wholesome sex adjustment.

Schwartz: That plan's crazy, and you know it—dear Professor. That's the trouble with you. You holler at me for not getting down to cases and seeing the real problem, but when you come up against one you take off with both feet and suggest a solution that is impossible.

Race: I guess so. Anyway, I'd certainly try to help people get rid of the notion that married women shouldn't teach just because they're married. That'd help some. Then, I'd do all I could to encourage the folks on my staff to get around socially and meet some men in the hope . . .

Schwartz: What about the men? You don't think that only the ladies are affected by the way this culture has messed up the sex problem, do you?

Race: Of course not, but I'll be satisfied with one victory at a time for two reasons. In the first place, most of the teachers are single women and in the second place, they're the ones that the culture is toughest on. They certainly have my sympathy.

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