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Millennials Need a "Think" Button

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What's your guess? Is time spent creating a Universe more valuable than time spent noticing who wears hats to church? I suppose if you are God, you could do both simultaneously so maybe it doesn't matter.

The church I was raised in had two branches. Frankly, I couldn't tell you the difference other than in one branch, the northern branch, it was strongly suggested that the women wore hats. Nothing special, just whatever it took to cover the head.

The other branch, the southern branch, was home to those who dared to bare.

Why would intelligent people bother with the hat-or-no-hat decision?

Because, to them, the hat no hat delima is a matter of morality. Here goes a generation of women wearing hats because "You're supposed to where a hat in church."

How many "you're supposed to's" are at work shaping adult behavior?

Morals: Things you are supposed to do (because someone, the church, you r grandmother, your third grade teacher) told you they are the right thing to do.

Ethics: Decisions you make for yourself based what will work best for everyone involved. A moral decision can also be an ethical decision. Morals are designed to eliminate the need for thinking... just do it.

I can't say that I have ever surveyed Millennials with the specific purpose in mind of discovering their stance on morals but extrapolating from experience, I will venture to say that morals don't matter much to Millennials. Thankfully, ethics do seem to matter to Millennials.

If a generation is defined by the "values and experiences anchored by the music and ceremony of their youth" then there may be a problem... not a moral issue, an ethical issue.

Our surveys and focus groups paint a (broad brush) picture of Millennials as being more pragmatic than their Boomer parents. For example, they don't

automatically extend their loyalty to a product or a job... you have to earn their loyalty. I suspect that kind of thinking applies to morals. (I doubt Millennials will prove to be as compliant as the generation that felt compelled to discuss the pros and cons of women wearing hats to church.)

The big question remains as to how Millennials learn what is right (although not necessarily moral) and what is wrong (although not necessarily immoral.) This is the job of Boomers and Traditionals as they play out their roles as parents and grandparents.. So far it looks like Millennials are learning more on their own than they are learning at the business end of the family dining room table. According to Time magazine this week in 1960 just over one in ten children lived apart from their father. In 2010 that number had almost tripled (27%). Moral or ethical, who, or what is the role model for decision making?

It was Christmas day and our dining room was set for ten and laden with the noise and laughter that goes so well with Italian food and family. My son, seated to my left, had received a "NO" button, one of those over-priced, "why-the-heck-would-you-need-this" thing from the Hallmark store. Each time you push the button, a disembodied voice says, "No!" ('Perfect if you are the Dad of a fourteen-year old girl. We just happened to have one at our end of the table. I should mention that the above referenced teenager is known in our house as The Princess. Not Princess. THE Princess.)

"Dad," said the prettiest girl in the whole wide world, "You don't need a NO button. I can pretty much guess what you are going to say." THE Princess looked at her mom, turned her smile into an impish grin, and said, "We need to buy you an "Ask Your Dad" button."

(I didn't expect a part in this conversation since I don't think of myself playing a parenting role... but apparently, I do. Since the day I first saw those beautiful blue eyes, I declared it would be my project to teach THE Princess to be an independent, strong, young woman. I don't care if she has good morals as long as she has great ethics.

So I guess it was no surprise that THE Princess turned to me and said, "Pops doesn't need a button. With Pops, I don't have to ask. I just have to use good judgment."

That's my Millennial! And if she is to have any button at all, I want it to say, "Think!"

T Scott Gross is the author of *Invisible: How Millennials Are Changing the Way We Sell*, winner 2012 USA Best Books Award

If you wonder what I was thinking when I wrote this post, <http://tscottgross.com/2012/12/millennials-need-a-think-button/think-button/>



thought
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