

MONDAY MANNA

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CREATING AN ATMOSPHERE OF 'CREATIVE ABRASION'

By Robert J. Tamasy

Recently I read social media comments presented by a business consultant and coach, Tim Kight. I have never met him, but I appreciate his pointed, practical thinking. What he posted about was the power of “creative abrasion. In other words, the value of disagreement.”

Kight added, “When we have different perspectives and then engage in creative abrasion to test and refine our ideas, we produce better solutions.” His observations are both old – and new. Especially for our times, when it seems we have misplaced or abandoned the fine art of civil discourse.

Many colleges and universities, for example, have created “safe zones” where students can retreat without fear of seeing or hearing viewpoints that differ from their own. Is this learning? Not having their ideas challenged? As protests, followed by rioting, have taken place in different parts of the world, it has become evident that everyone is talking – even shouting – but no one is listening.

Even with the coronavirus pandemic, a variety of opinions and perspectives have emerged. Rather than applauding the free exchange of ideas, however, the media and politicians have largely discouraged this. Which, it appears, is to the detriment of everyone. “Creative abrasion” is regarded as an alien concept, something to be feared rather than embraced.

This kind of friction, however, is something I valued, even when I was not familiar with Kight’s term. Especially during my years as an editor of newspapers and a magazine. In meeting with the editorial team to plan upcoming editions, we each had different ideas. We allowed them to be presented, then would discuss and often, debate them. In the process, we invariably discovered the whole (the finished product) was greater than the sum of the parts (our individual contributions).

The fact that creative abrasion is not supported in many environments is sad, because this is hardly a novel idea. In fact, The Bible advocates this strongly. Consider the following passages:

Friction is mutually beneficial. Imagine the blades of two knives clashing together, each making the other sharper. The same occurs between people, whether in a workplace setting, a marriage, a ministry, or a sports team. Rubbing up against each other, even with civil, congenial conflict, we can make one another better. *“As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another”* (Proverbs 27:17).

Value in differing viewpoints. In court cases, multiple witnesses are often asked to give testimony so the judge or jury can receive a full, accurate account. In a similar sense, we might be convinced of our opinion or viewpoint, but if we are willing to listen to other perspectives, we may discover we are wrong – or that the best solution is a combination of a variety of ideas. *“What you have seen with your eyes do not bring hastily to court, for what will you do in the end if your neighbour puts you to shame?”* (Proverbs 25:8).

Correction can be helpful. Pride can be a great obstacle in our pursuit of success, especially feeling self-assured that we are in the right, whether our thinking or actions. “Creative abrasion” might cause some pain, but in the end, we often find ourselves better off because of it. *“Like an earring of gold or an ornament of fine gold is a wise man’s rebuke to a listening ear”* (Proverbs 25:12).

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

In your own words, what do you understand is meant by the term, "creative abrasion"?

Have you ever seen this – constructive disagreement – in action, used in positive, productive ways? Explain your answer.

Why do you think this idea, allowing for and even encouraging the free exchange of different ideas, including the freedom to disagree, often receives disfavor?

Give an example of a time when you have seen the truth of "iron sharpening iron" being practiced in the workplace.

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages:

Joshua 2:1

Proverbs 10:19-21, 12:14,18

Mark 6:7

Philippians 4:9

2 Timothy 2:2