

Speaking

by Bonnie Neugebauer

“Be the change you want to see in the world.” These words of Mahatma Gandhi speak a powerful and disturbing message about change — it must begin with us, with me.

Although we can't always determine solutions to challenges or foresee perfect outcomes, we can usually figure out steps to take, to begin. We can do it — create change that is outward action, something we set in motion outside ourselves, something that we cause others to do. I can (and often do) come up with ideas about how colleagues, family members, and world leaders might think about changing (for the better, according to me). I can analyze procedures and systems and see a better way of doing just about everything. It's really quite easy to suggest change for others. We are problem solvers. We can do it. As early childhood professionals, we do do it — and the scope of our doing extends beyond professional boundaries and includes global initiatives around children and families.

But it's just so much harder to do the inside work. Gandhi didn't say, *do it*. He said, *be it*. “Be the change” What does that mean?

Does that mean if I want others to listen, I must become a listener?

Does it mean that if I want children to eat nutritional foods, I must become a healthy eater?

Does it mean that if I want the world to be a place of peace, I must deal with the negative issues inside my head?

Does it really mean that all the expectations I have for people in my life,
 all the hopes and dreams I have for the world, have to be grounded deep within me?

What a lot of work I have to do. To change myself takes so much energy.

Long ago I had a conversation with Margie Carter about diversity in the workplace, acknowledging the value of staff with different perspectives, experiences, cultures, gender, and age. But I was thinking how we would welcome these differences if and when they knocked on our door. Margie responded, “You have to go out there and look for who and what you want. If you want diverse staff, then you need to make it happen. You can't sit there and wait.” In other words, the change must begin within me.

Does this mean that if I want more male teachers, I have to commit and then go out there and find them?

Does it mean that if I want teachers to be professionals, to *be* professional, I must be professional?

Does it mean that if I want teachers to be justly compensated for their work,
 that I must commit and figure out how to make it happen?

Does it mean that if I want others to be authentic, honest, ethical,
 that I must be authentic, honest, and ethical (always) myself?

Just as the doing is a journey, the being is a pathway. I can't suddenly, immediately, be thin or physically fit. Being takes time and it can happen while we are doing. It's the mindset that matters.

Doing is out there, being is within ourselves. Doing can change others and the world. Being changes and enables us. Being gives us the strength and commitment to keep doing. “Be the change. . . .”

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