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Nothing to Prove

Skills and Professional Development





Are we good parents, partners, lawyers, bosses, and leaders? If we aren't now, but want to be, then it is our responsibility to make this change our new reality.

But how do we know if we're a good partner, lawyer, or leader? Is that a designation we give ourselves or does someone have to tell us? We should not measure our worth; it's for others to decide. How our role impacts others is what counts. If people think we are — we probably are.

Have you ever asked if you are good or great, or even bad, or some other measure? Do you care?

All too often, we go through our roles in life with one perception about who we are. But in reality, we may give off a completely different impression to those we impact. It's this lack of self-awareness that keeps us from being the best we can be. We cannot be good role models without a clear understanding of our interactions with others and the world. So we have to be vulnerable. We have to be open to other people and then change those inadequate aspects as we grow. It's helpful to remember that being good for one group of people may not translate to being good with a different group.

As much as we'd like to think our identity is consistent everywhere we go, we actually behave and perform differently as our environments and circumstances change. Our values don't change, but our roles do, and it is imperative that we adapt to attend to new responsibilities.

For example, imagine you are a boss, manager, or someone in a position of power. Your title gives you the authority to direct people and the way they perform their jobs. While this is not necessarily the best way to get people to follow your lead, as the boss, it is what's allowed. However, take away your title and you'll have to find another way to get your employees to act accordingly. In order to get them to perform, you have to influence them.

If someone observed you acquiesce your power, they might erroneously reach the conclusion that

you've changed somehow. But the truth is that the circumstances have changed. It is appropriate to direct someone's actions if you have authority over them, but this is not the case when that authority does not exist.

Let's take another example. If you're an emotional person, the way you display your emotions in the workplace should be different from how you display them at home. While it may be perfectly appropriate to cry when you are frustrated at home, that same display of emotion in the board room is not acceptable. You are allowed to be frustrated, but you are expected to channel that frustration in another manner. It is no different from what we attempt to teach our children. They are entitled to their feelings, but we teach and encourage them to channel those emotions in a positive manner.

When we know who we are, it becomes easier to navigate the various roles we occupy. It is only when we don't have anything to prove that we stop pretending to be something we are not.

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Whitnie Wiley was a long-time columnist for the *ACC Docket*, where she wrote the Lead the Way column for more than seven years. The column provided leadership tips for in-house counsel and others as they pursue their personal and professional goals.