



THE STORY: GETTING WHAT YOU WANT – THE OTHER WAY

There is a story of an elderly man who lived in a house on a corner. His corner lot had a fence around it. The house was on the way to an elementary school. It seemed like every day kids would come by and throw paper wrappers, pop cans, or schoolwork in his yard.

The man thought about confronting the young lads but didn't want to yell at them, as he didn't want them to be even more inconsiderate. One day he caught the boys going by his house. He said, "I know you are throwing stuff over the fence into my yard." The boys immediately denied they had ever done that.

The man continued, "I have seen you do it." The boys were about to run when the man said, "Wait a minute, I want you to throw stuff on my lawn." The young boys were puzzled. They thought he was crazy. The man said, "To show you I'm serious, I will give you one dollar for every day you throw your garbage into my yard." Now the boys knew the old man was crazy, but they said they would do it.

The next day the boys tested the man. They threw papers over the fence. The man waited by the side of the house, came out, and gave them a dollar. He told them they did a good job and to keep doing it. This went on for two weeks.

After two weeks the man met the young boys and said, "This is getting expensive, and I can't afford to pay you a dollar a day. I'll give you a quarter a day if you keep throwing your papers over the fence."

The boys responded, "Who do you think we are? We aren't going to do this for a quarter!" The man never had to clean up his yard again.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How do people normally react in a situation like this one? What, generally, are the results in such situations?
2. In the story, the man weighs his alternatives. Confrontation would have meant yelling and more inconsiderate behavior by the boys. So he sought an alternative. What is required of people in order for them to stop, think, and seek another alternative? Explain a situation you've seen in your setting where slowing down and exploring alternatives would certainly have been better.
3. What skills and attitudes are required to “shape-shift” a circumstance from one that was potentially destructive to one that is potentially constructive? And why bother with constructive at all?
4. Are there examples from your workplace where motivation and rewards might be changed to make the outcomes of difficulties more positive? What changes can you personally make? Explain.

WHAT IF ...

1. The man got angry, yelled, or called the police?
2. The kids simply refused to talk to the elderly man?

NOTES TO MYSELF
