

DO YOU ACT OR REACT?

I walked with a friend, a quaker, to the newsstand the other night. He bought a paper, and thanked the newsboy politely. The newsboy didn't even acknowledge it.

"A sullen fellow, isn't he? I commented.

Oh he's that way every night, shrugged to my friend.

Then why do you continue to be so polite to him? I asked.

Why not? Inquired my friend. Why should I let him decide how I'm going to act?"

As I thought about this incident later, it occurred to me that the important word was act. My friend asked towards people; Miss of us react toward them. He has a sense of inner balance lacking in most of us: he knows who he is? What he stands for, and how he should behave. He refuses to return incivility for incivility, because then he would no longer be in command of his own conduct.

Nobody is in happier than the perpetual reactor. His center of emotional gravity is not read it within himself, where it belongs, but in the world outside him. His temperature is always being raised or lowered by the social climate around him, and he is Aamir creature at the mercy of these elements.

Praise gives him a feeling of euphoria, Which is false, because it does not last and it does not come from self approval. Criticism depresses him more than it should, because it confirms his own secretly shaking opinion of himself. Snub hurts him, and the merest Suspicion of unpopularity in any quarter Rouses him to bitterness.

Serenity cannot be achieved until we become the masters of our own actions and attitudes. To let another determine whether we shall be rude or gracious, elated are depressed, is to relinquish control over your own personalities, which is ultimately all we possess. The only true possession is so possession.

- Condensed from the Chicago Daily News
By Sydney J. Harris.