

Uncover “What’s on the Inside.”

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Last night at dinner my goddaughter Zoe, asked Michael and I some questions:

“How did the two of you meet?”

“At Volleyball”

“Who asked who out first?”

“Michael did”

“Michael, why did you ask Tammy out?”

“Because she was beautiful”

I, of course, was flattered. Zoe, however, started shaking her head no and told us “what’s important is what’s on the inside – not what’s on the outside.”

From the mouth of babes...

She’s right. I’ve watched as countless friends and acquaintances have missed warning signals because they fell into the lure of external beauty. But we don’t just make these kinds of mistakes in our personal lives. We see this same kind of “external judgement” in the workplace – but it’s not limited to attractiveness.

- “She’s way too young. She won’t be able to handle it.”
- “With that beard and turban – will our customers think he’s a terrorist?”
- “We’re a high energy workplace. At that weight -- she’ll never keep up.”
- “He’s too old. He won’t be able to learn the new technology.”
- “The job requires relationship skills – we’re going to need a woman for that.”

There's something called the 7-11 rule. In our first 7 seconds of contact with an individual we form 11 impressions. Those impressions may end up being true or false – but they are based on visual clues that we then run through our own set of personal biases.

For instance, when I was in my twenties – I thought people in their 50's were OLD. Too OLD to do certain things – like play competitive volleyball. And now that I'm in my 50's I've been known to think that people in their 20's are way too YOUNG to know how to do important things – like have children or run a critical project without oversight.

Do you see how foolish I was – or am?

Our biases can create an Us versus Them scenario.

- Millennial versus Baby Boomer
- West versus East
- Black versus White
- Athlete versus Geek
- Women versus Men
- Body art versus Tattoo free

Let's remember Zoe's wisdom: "what's important is what's on the inside – not what's on the outside."

Not all young, old, black, white, men, women, middle easterners, US citizens -- or any other "group" for that matter – are carbon copies of one another. Each person is their own individual human being. And regardless of their outside shell – you'll find that some people love to learn new things while others prefer to become masters of repetitive tasks. Some people are fast, others are methodical. Some are people oriented. Others are task oriented. And all of this good stuff can be found on the inside.

We miss out when we use an individual's outward appearance as our barometer. We miss out on talent. We miss out on innovative ideas. And we miss out on organizational growth. It takes work, skill and effort to "find out what's under the hood" – so to speak. But in the end – it's worth it. People who put in the work and effort have better long-term relationships. And research by McKinsey & Company has found that organizations who put in the work and effort have improved engagement scores, lower turnover and higher financial returns.

Unemployment in Iowa is running under 3% right now – and the perfect employee might just be the individual that you overlooked because of what they looked like. Now is the time to stop being blinded by candidates outside appearance and learn what it takes to uncover "what's on the inside."