Charlene Kidder

In My Opinion...
Dean Says:

Learning Well, So You Can Think and Act for Yourself!

An old sign hung on the cubicle wall across the aisle from my desk at the insurance company where I worked for 30 years. The sign read: "Lead, Follow, or Get Out of the Way!"

Do you ever follow what someone else is doing? Do you copy another's behavior?

Back when you were a child, if one of your friends jumped off a mound of dirt, did you jump, too? Or, maybe you saw someone make a funny face, so you made a funny face, too?

As an adult, if one of your friends shows you his or her new high definition television, do you begin to think about buying a new TV? Or, your friend shows you his or her new smartphone and you check on-line to see if it's time for you to get a new smartphone, too?

Now sometimes, if you do what someone else does, that's okay. For example, as a child, if you saw your older brothers and sisters, or your mom and dad, washing their hands before they ate dinner and you decided to wash your hands, too—well, you did a good thing. Copying others, of course, will not always be a good thing.

Sometimes, when we copy what other people do or say, we can get ourselves into trouble. Some say, "What we learn as a child we perfect as an adult."

If you see someone do something nasty or mean to another person, you might decide to be mean or nasty to that person, too. Or, if you hear someone share a bit of tasty gossip about someone you don't like very much, you might decide to pass that tasty bit of gossip on to one of your friends.

Or, maybe you're in a meeting and you hear someone say something that doesn't seem quite right to you. Instead of questioning what you're being told, you remain silent and just go along with the crowd. You might even tell yourself that by remaining silent you are "preserving the peace." Instead, by remaining silent—by copying what the others in the room are doing—you may well be helping to create chaos.

But, do you know what? You're an adult now. And, you can take positive action to protect yourself from copying other people when they do bad or foolish or lazy or just plain wrong things.

You can learn all you can about any subject in which you routinely engage. You can so focus your attention on the task of acquiring information about your chosen subject that you will, in fact, learn facts that will keep you in good stead no matter what circumstance in which you may find yourself.

You won't have to copy others. Rather, you will know for yourself and be able to act by yourself. You will not depend on the leadership of others. You will become a leader.

In the fire alarm industry, you may discover that certain design, installation, maintenance, or testing procedures have become quite common. These procedures or practices have become so commonplace that virtually everyone in the industry uses them. However, when you do a bit of investigating you discover—to your surprise—that some of these standard practices actually violate certain specific requirements of NFPA 72-2010, *National Fire Alarm and Signaling Code®*.

For example, over the course of many years, countless thousands of fire alarm systems' installations supervised sprinkler control valves by using a normally-closed switch that would open to indicate a supervisory off-normal condition. But, the circuit to which this switch connected could not distinguish between the actuation of the switch and a break in the wiring.

The *Code* had long required a distinctive indication. Nevertheless, many designers, installers, and Authorities Having Jurisdiction kept using and permitting the use of the normally-closed supervisory switch. It became an industry standard practice.

Fortunately, one manufacturer had individuals in research and development that actually read the *Code* and discovered this long-term error. They developed modules for their fire alarm control unit that would use normally-open supervisory switches on a circuit that could distinguish between an actuation and a circuit fault.

You would think these forward thinking folks should receive praise. To the contrary, they were roundly criticized. But, eventually, the right position prevailed. Today, using normally-open switches has become the industry standard and *Code*-complying practice.

You can learn well, so you can think and act for yourself. It's truly worth the effort. In fact, doing so marks you as a professional. And, you certainly want to earn that label. ❑