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PROSELYTIZING NOT RECOMMENDED

By J. Morris Hicks

While writing my first book in 2010, I was living in a quaint New England village by the sea and I knew virtually all 1200 residents by sight and about half of them by name. Just before moving there in 2003, I had become curious about the optimal diet for humans. During my extensive study, I had made startling discoveries related to saving lives and preserving life itself on planet Earth. So, what should I now be telling my new friends about those discoveries?

The short answer is nothing, unless I am asked a question. So how are we supposed to spread the word about what we consider the most important topic in the history of humanity--the staggering consequences of what we eat?

First, let's remember that eating is a very important and very personal part of everyone's life. Our entire existence is centered around eating, especially our social interactions and cultural and religious traditions. The notion that our own mothers might not have known what we should be eating or that we have been feeding food to our loved ones

that contributes to their ill health is a tough pill to swallow for most people. So how do you help your friends and loved ones discover the amazing truths that you have learned about food choices?

Just live your own life and always try to do what you think is right, while remembering that it's a fine line between caring and proselytizing. When someone wants to hear your opinion about diet, they will ask you a question.

My guidelines on proselytizing are similar to my thoughts about selling. No one likes to be “sold” anything. I prefer the word “marketing,” which can be a subtle process of cultivating a desire to purchase something. Here’s my list of behavioral guidelines on this delicate subject:

1. Never offer unsolicited advice to anyone.
2. Don’t make negative comments about an unhealthy looking meal someone else is eating.
3. Never talk about health or diet with anyone unless they ask for your opinion.
4. When people do ask for information, try to keep your initial response to a minimum. If they want to know more, they will ask.
5. Try to keep delicate discussions one-on-one. If someone asks about your eating philosophy in front of a lot of people, try to offer a concise, courteous response--then offer to continue the conversation later, perhaps over a healthy meal.

So you might be thinking, “If we can’t tell people about the powerful truths that we have learned, how can we make a difference?” For starters, we can follow this simple advice from Gandhi:

Be the change you want to see in the world.

The more specific answer may be different for everyone. In my case, I decided to start a blog, write a book, get some speaking engagements, create the helpful 4Leaf concept, do some corporate consulting, become an activist and start a business aimed at helping to change the global feeding model. The more energy I put into what I do, the more doors continue to open.

To summarize, I simply don't like proselytizing and I don't think other people like being on the receiving end of it. Further, I must remember that over 90% of my friends still eat meat and dairy and that I am in the very small minority. As such, I should try to minimize uncomfortable situations for all concerned. In the long run, I sincerely believe that this approach works best. Here's an example:

Recently, a yacht club friend walked up to me at a party and told me how much he liked my book, *Healthy Eating, Healthy World*. And he did so in front of several other people. This former president of Reebok then told me that the book was "simple, not too long, easy to read and compelling--without being full of zealotry."

He then added that he would be making some changes in his own diet as a result of what he had learned from the book. I simply thanked him deeply for the feedback.

The Bottom Line. We all know that food is a very personal topic for everyone. Perhaps this chapter will help in terms of how we best share our message without causing any discomfort or resentment. People are less likely to follow your example if they resent you.