

December, 2007

To All Members of the Union High School Track Alumni:

At his retirement dinner, a close friend of mine, Tony Naclerio, used the following quotes in reflecting on his 40 plus years in education. Tony is now coaching at Rutgers, after a distinguished career at Essex Catholic and Morris Hills. He was also the head of U.S. Olympic Development Program, and coach of the Olympic team at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics. The quotes were:

I have come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It is my personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily mood that creates the weather. I possess tremendous power to make a life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration; I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated, and a person humanized or de-humanized. - Dr. Haim Ginott, *Teacher and Child* (1976).

If we treat people as they are, we make them worse. If we treat people as they ought to be, we help them become what they are capable of becoming.  
- Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe

One of the gifts of retirement is that it gives you time to reflect, and at times I have looked back upon both my coaching career and the past five Alumni Track Reunions. At the first dinner, I was about to lie down on the table, as I thought I was at my own wake, given the nice things Jack, Mark, Mike, Don, and Bill said about me. At more recent dinners, I remember Pete's honest statement, and the comments of Joanne, Gary, Keith, Charlie, and Ken Bauer's father. Bob and Ray talked about how I said I wasn't mad, but I was "perturbed". But the thing that really made me think about some of the things I have said in the past was when my two sixteen year old granddaughters recently told me they would not drink grapefruit juice, or eat a grapefruit, because when they were younger I told them to drink it and that it would "put hair on their chest", and of course, they did not want that to happen.

So, I have concluded that many of my words did strike home. If I hurt or offended some of you, I am sorry. If I helped you, I am very happy. I can only tell you that my sole motivation was, as the old Army commercial goes, "to make you the best you could be".

I now know that the defense of contemporary "rap artists", that it is only words and they don't mean anything, and the childhood adage that "sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me", are both false. Since words do count, I would like to wish all of you a Happy Holiday Season, a Happy, Healthy, Wealthy New Year, and a long, prosperous life. Thank you for all of the wonderful memories you have given me.

Hope to see you all in June 2008,  
Coach!