

## Socrates Didn't Know Much, Nor Do Our Teens

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True wisdom comes to each of us when we realize how little we understand about life, ourselves and the world around us.

- [Socrates](#), Greek philosopher (470 BCE-399 BCE)

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Okay, asking questions is what we know as the Socratic Method. Socrates wasn't interested so much in the accumulation of facts, as our schools are today. He was interested in developing the ability to think in his students, something that many schools avoid today because they don't want their students figuring out why so much is wrong in their lives and their world.

Through questions, Socrates guided his students to figuring out answers and solutions for themselves. He caused them to think, he drew out parts of their thinking process as a sculpture carves off unwanted chips from the desired perfect statue within.

The more Socrates learned, the more he realized how much more there was to learn. His main focus was human nature and the world around his students, each of which were bottomless pits when it came to the depths to which a person can go to master them. Eventually he knew too much about the true worth of each human being, railed against his military leader for wanting to take Athens into a war it could not win (no one wins a war), and had to sip poison or be run through with a sword to keep him quiet.

Two and a half millennia after Socrates lived, our education systems teach almost nothing about human nature and many parents try to keep their children "innocent" of the ugly world that even they know must face their kids when they grow up. That's western culture, though it's being adopted holus-bolus by India, China and other countries that want to be "developed" into industrial powerhouses with sheep-like workers/consumers supporting their every move so they can gain wealth.

So what happens? The innocent children become ignorant adolescents. But not stupid adolescents. They see what their parents have kept from them, realize how hypocritical they have been in neglecting their duties and responsibilities of preparing their offspring to face the world of adults, and they rebel.

Rebellious teenagers are not a natural function of their age. In many cultures where life skills and human nature are taught actively and purposefully, teens experience no dissociation from the world around them.

In the west, kids rebel because they realize that the world they had been expecting--that their parents had them living in for their first decade--doesn't exist, that it's a cruel, ugly, dog-eat-dog world of greedy others who want everything for themselves and are prepared to give nothing to others to get it.

Almost all of them grow beyond this stage when they find in later years that there are good people, kind people, caring people who are among their neighbours and work mates. The greed and ignorance remains with the majority of people they will know, but at least they will know a few people who care about life in general more than they do about their own wealth and the status of their family.

What's the culture of the world around them while they are in high school? Appearance is the most important factor in securing friends and being popular. Twenty years later they see that the attractive kids in high school have poor relationships, poor self image and struggle with getting good jobs unless they have developed skills to go along with their looks. But in high school, the best looking kids hold the top of the social heap.

Music is extremely important to teens. In recent studies, 89 percent of teens said that it's the most important thing

in life other than their friends (which tied at 89 percent). Too many parents wonder why their teenaged kids are so devoted to their music. But the parents pay no attention to the words of the music (if they could understand them) and the emotional satisfaction the kids get out of experiencing the music. They don't ask, maybe because they don't want to know the answers.

Teens want very little (in some cases, no) physical contact with their parents (the rebellious ones especially), yet they crave the touch of their peers. They join sports where touching is part of the game. Their dancing, though ostensibly individual, has them coming in intimate contact with their partners, even if the partners might be strangers. Petting and sex (at least to some degree) is a peer expectation.

They want to touch each other, but not necessarily their parents, because their parents have deprived them of the amount of loving touch they needed as younger children. Their peers also want to be touched, so they have lots of willing touch partners for the various touching activities in which they participate. And they find many ways to touch.

Teens get what they lacked in their younger years. They dislike the hypocrisy of their parents who hid the realities of the world from them. But they don't have a source where they can learn to think for themselves unless they go to one of a few schools that specialize in these skills. Most don't have that opportunity.

Importantly, they don't develop the habit of learning for a lifetime, the way Socrates taught his students. They don't ask questions, being afraid to show themselves as lacking knowledge. They pay others to do what they need when they don't know how to do for themselves. Or they do without. Asking questions, it seems, is a sign of weakness among this generation. They learned that from their parents, whom most acknowledge are their primary sources of information about life (88 percent).

At the same time we have an older generation that has learned the hard way, flying by the seats of their pants, that is all too willing to share what they have learned so that the kids don't have to go through the viciously tough learning process they did--trial and error, by making mistakes and learning from them. We have an older generation that knows what the younger generation wants to know, but the younger ones won't ask because they have learned that asking shows weakness and submission.

Where are the Socrates's of today, asking questions to help students learn to think for themselves and to know where to find answers? Alas, few can be found in classrooms.

In the United States, the average teaching career today is five years. Teachers who don't rigorously follow the curriculum, who teach their students to think, come under such pressure from the administration that they leave before they are asked to sip poison themselves.

Socrates, the man, never wrote down a word of what he taught. Yet he is fondly remembered today, millennia later. There's a role model to follow.

Teach young people to think, to ask questions, to learn where they can learn what they need to know. Nobody knows all the answers today. The best we can do is to teach the younger generation where to look for the answers and solutions they need. That's a critical life skill today.

As you have read this far, you understand your mission. Thanks for reading. We can do this together.

Bill Allin

***Turning It Around: Causes and Cures for Today's Epidemic Social Problems*** a book about how, what and when to teach children what they need to know that most aren't getting in schools or at home.

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