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Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer® and a Four-Year-Old: Lessons for Leadership & Life

By: Connie Reimers-Hild, Ph.D.
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Last week while I was in the shower, my four-year-old daughter, Raquel, walked into the bathroom and asked me an interesting question. “Mom, why doesn’t anyone like Rudolph’s shiny red nose?” My daughter was supposed to be in bed sleeping. I am 99% sure she was lying in bed reflecting on her day.

Many nights I have quietly checked on her before going to bed myself only to find her talking to herself while she makes vivid hand gestures and motions. On this particular evening, her talk and gestures must have focused on Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer. After thinking about the question, “Why doesn’t anyone like Rudolph’s shiny red nose?” for quite sometime, she must have needed a second opinion. So, she came to the shower. I quickly dried off and spotted a great opportunity: exploring the wonderfully creative mind of a four-year-old.

Instead of sharing my thoughts, I put on my coaching hat and asked Raquel about what she thought. The conversation went something like this:

Me: What makes you think people don’t like Rudolph’s shiny red nose?

Raquel: Everyone makes fun of him and calls him names. Clarice’s dad wouldn’t let her play with Rudolph. And, Rudolph’s Dad tried to cover up his nose. He wanted to hide it.

Me: How did seeing all of that make you feel?

Raquel: I was sad for Rudolph.

Me: What was good about Rudolph having a shiny red nose?

Raquel: I don’t know.

Me: Sure you do! What did Santa ask Rudolph to do at the end of the movie?

Raquel: To lead his sleigh.

Me: That’s right. Rudolph saved Christmas with his shiny red nose. Would Rudolph have been able to save Christmas without his shiny red nose?

Raquel: No. His red nose helped Santa! And, Hermie wanted to be a dentist. Hermie helped save Rudolph, Clarice and his Mom and Dad by pulling out the monster's teeth.

Me: That's right. Both Rudolph and Hermie had special talents that helped others. Great job Raquel! So, was it a good or bad thing that Rudolph and Hermie were different?

Raquel: It was a good thing!

Raquel and I continued to discuss the challenges and opportunities of being different. We talked a lot about the special contributions people can make because of their unique talents and abilities. We closed the conversation by discussing the importance of staying out of judgment while creating understanding.

Seeing the world through the eyes of a child is such a tremendous gift. Obviously, a number of the things she noticed while watching Rudolph's story unfold bothered her, and she needed to process the information. I have watched Rudolph for decades, so I didn't think twice about the importance of the message. I was not seeing and hearing the details she observes. I only "kind of" pay attention because Rudolph has just always been there! I started taking the many messages this movie tells us for granted.

My four-year-old daughter reminded me about the importance of looking at situations from a different lens. It is important to accept others and keep yourself out of judgment. Truly, there is strength in diversity. Unfortunately, some people struggle with this concept. They need to be in charge, and they are always right. People who think, act and behave in this manner stifle creativity and engagement. They do not realize how important it is to empower others so they can make unique contributions while creating sustainable change.

Raquel also reminded me about the importance of reexamining information that you have read or heard numerous times. She taught me to reexamine perceptions and experiences. In my own life, I am in the process of looking for opportunities while working through one of the most difficult challenges of my career. It has been a challenging journey. Fortunately, I am choosing to put up my new "Raquel and Rudolph" lens and find a new path. One thing I know from years of research and experience: **On the flip side of a challenge exists an opportunity**. We live in a wonderful country where opportunity abounds! I am always looking for mine, and I hope you are looking for yours!

Go Wild!

Dr. Connie

More about Dr. Connie:

Dr. Connie Reimers-Hild is an Extension Educator in Innovation at the University of Nebraska.

She is also a leadership coach specializing in developing sustainable innovation for people, organizations and communities with a focus on personal fulfillment and fun!

Contact Dr. Connie (creimers2@unl.edu) for your complimentary coaching session today!



Dr. Connie offers customized leadership and innovation coaching to individuals, teams and organizations by utilizing the Inner-Leader Coaching Ecosystem. Walking through the ecosystem will help you:

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What is your Core Vision? Your Core Mission?
What do you want to experience?
What is working? What needs to change?

2) Decide:

What are you willing to commit to in order to achieve your vision?
How will you measure and monitor success?

3) Design:

What structures can be created and implemented to enable and support sustainable change and innovation?

4) Dare:

How can you reframe risk and take action with confidence and awareness?