

THE UN-COMFORT ZONE

With Robert Wilson

Keep Your Power

"Baby Bobby! Baby Bobby!" The words stung and Mike knew it - he could read it in my face.

"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me!" I yelled back.



Mike just laughed; he knew I didn't believe it. Bolstered by figuring out how to push my buttons, he continued to torment me as I walked home from school.

"Baby Bobby! Baby Bobby!"

The charge had an element of truth because I had cried several times in first grade, but I was now in fifth grade and had long outgrown my fear of school. I recalled the menacing teacher who pounded her paddle on our desks and threatened to spank us if we kept talking in class. She made several kids cry, but I was the one who got the reputation. It wasn't fair, but four years later I was still ashamed of my crying and Mike knew it. He continued the harassment.

"Baby Bobby! Baby Bobby!"

He stuck his face right in mine and stated deliberately, "Baby... Bobby!"

I punched him in the nose, and suddenly he was the one crying. I had to fight several more boys that year before the name-calling stopped. It was not the solution I wanted, but it worked. It took me years to learn that the problem was mine; that I was giving away my power every time I

reacted to taunting and teasing. And, it's a problem that doesn't go away with childhood.

Insecure adults wanting to feel superior will seek out your weaknesses and attempt to make you feel bad. Several years ago, I was invited to speak on Creative Thinking in Business to a civic club luncheon. During the meal, a man at my table sneered, "Sooo, you're a motivational speaker. Well, motivate me!" His tone of voice said it all - the difference between him and a school yard bully was the accompanying, "Na Na Na Na Nah."

I was shocked by the un-professionalism, and thought, "I'm getting heckled, and I'm not even on stage yet." So, I laughed and said, "Dude, nobody can motivate you, but you."

He shocked me a second time by apologizing after my presentation. He explained that the club had a new speaker each week who tried to sell something, and that most of them were boring. To his surprise, he said he found my presentation entertaining and motivating.

If we give in to bullies, they can rob us of our confidence and our

motivation. Lately, I've worked with my children on how to not give their power away when kids assault them verbally. "Laugh it off," I tell them, "even if the words hurt. Fake it if you have to; the trick is to fool them into thinking it doesn't bother you."

My friend Rob Maxwell uses what he calls Verbal Judo to fend off words that hit like a fist. "In some martial arts," he explains, "you don't meet force with force. Instead, you take your opponent's thrust and redirect it away from you. Often their own energy works against them."

As an example, he told me of a college friend who was teasing him about losing his hair. Rob replied, "It's true John, I am losing my hair, but you were always the handsome one."

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