

## Don't Do as I Do

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By Beverley O'Neil

"Don't do as I do. Do as I say." Growing up I heard that over and over again and although I eventually I understood what my dad meant when he said it, I was probably in my teen years by then and didn't listen to him anyway. Do you think that's what Premier Gordon Campbell meant when he apologized to BC for drinking and driving "Don't do as I do, do as I say"?

Being the Premier, I guess Gordie gets to enjoy a few more liberties than the average Joe, John, Karen, Mary and Paula, such as knowingly breaking the law with the only consequence being a tearful apology. A much easier task to face than the court case he put his predecessor through to defend himself for an act he was later found not guilty of. High standards of office were demanded of Gordon's predecessor Premier Glen Clark, and before that, of Premier Bill Vander Zalm. Neither Glen nor Bill were found guilty of the offences they defended themselves of, yet they were required to leave public office.

Why is it that one leader is required to answer for their actions and another is not? What messages does this send to our youth?

A week after Gordie made his tearful public apology for DWI and it was revealed his blood alcohol content level was more than double the .08 police begin charging the average Joe at for Driving While Impaired (DWI), I was speaking with groups of young Aboriginal males age 15 to 25 about DWI. The first question they asked was, "Can we talk about Premier Gordon Campbell?" At their young age they knew that drinking and driving was illegal and wondered why the 55-year old Gordon Campbell didn't. But the most compelling remark they made was, "The Premier should be setting the example for the rest of us. How can we be expected to respect the law when the provincial leader knowingly breaks it?"

The conversation continued to include parents, and First Nation Chiefs and Councils. For too many youth, the messages they receive are mixed. Community leaders express, "We care about our youth." Adding, "We need to set a good example for them and create a healthy community. Don't do drugs. Don't smoke. Don't drink and drive." Well, the youth know that smoking kills, that drugs are bad and illegal, and they know that drinking and driving is illegal and wrong. After speaking with them on their views, I think many of them knew more about DWI than adults. They know that DWI can result in injury and death. Just ask them. They know. They know a lot. And then they see the adults and leaders in the community smoking. They get the Band sold cigarettes from their parents because they can't buy them since they are underage, and people in the community know who the drug dealers are, because the community is small and everyone knows everybody.

And nobody does anything about it.

The people they see as the community leaders may even be the ones selling or using the drugs or cigarettes or alcohol... or the ones that drink and drive. All around them examples are being set and the youth are told, "Don't do this. Don't do that." As they watch the adults do just what they've been told not to. "Don't do as I do. Do as I say."

They're teenagers, so they don't listen to their parents or other adults, especially the ones that say one thing then do the other, and so the youth do as they see others do and "Parents wonder why the streams are bitter, when they themselves have poisoned the fountain." (John Locke, 17<sup>th</sup> Century English Philosopher)

Perhaps James Baldwin hit the nail on the head when he remarked, "Children have never been very good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them." This emphasizes the important role that not only parents play in raising our youth, but also the important role that we all play in raising children captured in the African/Ashanti proverb "It takes a whole village to raise a child."

And they do look to adults to be the role models they aspire to be. "The question for the child is not 'Do I want to be good?' but 'Whom do I want to be like?'" (Bruno Bettelheim, 20<sup>th</sup> -century German/American child psychologist, author). First Nations need to give them more positive role models to aspire to be; not just the ones that are awarded for their work then outside of that are known to do or deal drugs, give their children cigarettes, abuse the people they're supposed to love, and drive home drunk.

In order for our communities to build healthy happy environments, change needs to take place... it is the responsibility of the adults, and especially the leaders and most important Chief and Council to set the example because "If we don't stand up for children, then we don't stand for much." (Marian Wright Edelman)

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Community Leaders, Chief and Council, be a part of planning the future for Children at the "Putting Children First" Forum on March 10 & 11, 2003. Register on-line at [www.designingnations.com](http://www.designingnations.com)

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