

# Chalkboard

By

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I think I have quoted him before in some past *Chalkboard*. Mr. Spock stated the conundrum best in “Star Trek: The Wrath Of Khan”, when upon having saved the Enterprise with a noble sacrifice of his life, he breathed, “Were I to invoke logic, however, logic clearly dictates that the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few.” That often is the case in education because the practice of education deals with live subjects- students, parents, staff, patrons, vendors, auditors, regulatory agencies, et seq.

Early on in my practice of school administration I discovered that yin/yang relationship of *rules vs. relationships*. I am not saying that I modeled balancing the two; I am just saying I was aware of the dichotomy.

I think the concept can equally be captured with the idea of *things vs. people*. Perhaps even without boarding a fictitious starship, the case might be made for the same idea being the *needs of the many versus the needs of the one*.

Lets do a hypothetical scenario. Imagine the case of the male student who has violated some serious school rule involving the threat of violence against another student. In the investigation of the matter it comes to light that the child is rumored to come from a physically and emotionally abusive home where the father regularly slaps the boy around and curses him for being a sissy. DHS has investigated but the claims have never been substantiated. The mother of the family pleads that she is in an impossible situation and begs for a second chance for her son. The rule demands suspension or expulsion. The relationship cries for compassion. Which side weighs the heaviest on that great teeter totter- the needs of the one or the needs of the many? If you are the mother of the rule-breaker you will seek what is best for your child. If you are the mothers of the other students who might be affected by the behavior of the rule-breaker you seek what is best for your respective children. If you are the administrator the almost certainty is that you will follow Spock’s logic.

That was a very simplistic example but not so far from the truth in every school administrator’s life. On one hand is the very core of public education- that every child should have an opportunity for an education. Coupled with that is the knowledge that no situation is exactly the same. On the other hand is the pressing need to maintain a safe environment in which

every child can attend classes without fear of harm. Into that boiling pot throw in the administrator's knowledge that some students are by age volatile by nature and often nurture, often acting first and thinking second. Good youngsters can still make bad decisions. But by necessity, time and time again, Spock's logic wins out- the needs of the many have to outweigh the needs of the few.

At Gentry schools parents are very fortunate to have principals, counselors, teachers, and others who work diligently to meet both the needs of the individual and the needs of the group. The school often works in conjunction with other outside social and legal agencies in seeking solutions for individuals who are having a problem meeting social norms of acceptance. There is not always a quick answer and sometimes there is not an answer at all. It is in those times that once again, Spock's logic has to prevail.

Complexities exist too in adult rules vs. relationships within school settings. I would hazard a guess that condition exists in any organization where people are bound to deal with other people. Earlier in this piece I named groups, for brevity's sake you can make up your own examples.

Any school administrator will tell you that no matter how difficult and complicated the task that has a "thing" at its root, such a task is by far easier than having to make a decision that will shape the future of another person's life. Having said such it may be well and fair to end this article with a reference to the words of Admiral James T. Kirk in "Star Trek III: The Search For Spock". You can look up that counterpoint if your heart is so inclined.

Meanwhile, at Gentry we will continue on with trying to meet both the needs of the one and the needs of the many.