



## **SIMON SAYS: SUCCESS STRATEGIES FOR THE ADULT PLAYGROUNDS OF LIFE**

By Dr. Maura Cullen

The games we played as children taught us many simple, basic lessons of how to play with others, build relationships and navigate the rules of childhood. Simon Says will take you back to visit the core lessons of one of your favorite childhood games and how we are still playing those games even as adults.

### **OLD LESSON #1**

#### **THE OBJECT OF THE GAME SIMON SAYS IS TO CATCH PEOPLE SCREWING UP AND THROW THEM OUT OF THE GAME.**

No matter how hard you work there will always be people who will criticize you. It is as though by making you feel bad they will somehow feel better about themselves. After awhile the weight of their negativity starts to take a toll and impacts the attitudes and energy of those around. Most people thrive on positive reinforcement and may not realize how this negativity impacts their work or relationships. We get so caught up in pleasing Simon and not screwing up that we are not focusing on what needs to get done.

### **NEW LESSON #1**

#### **CATCH PEOPLE DOING SOMETHING WELL**

Catching people doing something well should be a continual process. We should not wait until the task is completed but instead reward people along the way because you do not always get the right outcome on the first attempt.

It is like teaching a toddler to walk. At first, we are delighted that they crawl, then, they progress to standing with our help. Pretty soon they are standing on their own and may manage a step or two before falling down. Even when they fail and fall down,

people clap and celebrate to let the toddler know how proud we are of them and their effort. Wouldn't it be nice if we all got acknowledged along the way for our efforts? If the child was punished and ridiculed for not walking on the very first attempt, the goal of walking would eventually get accomplished but at great harm to the child.

There is little doubt that punishment can be very effective. And although punishment may manipulate someone to behave in a certain manner, it is not terribly motivating. There are so many "Simon's" in our lives; a boss, parents, religious leaders, peers, etc... Some of these people believe that the way to influence people is through fear and intimidation. In the short term this can be an effective approach. However, in the long term it will begin to lose its appeal. Most effective leaders know they must empower others and encourage them to take risks. By positively motivating each individual, you create a more loyal and energized following. In this way, the benefits for rewarding people for doing something well will far outlast the fear and punishment that too many people employ. If we praise and reward one another for being innovative and taking risks, it will make a dramatic shift in how we do business.

### **OLD LESSON #2**

#### **ONE MISTAKE AND YOU ARE OUT OF THE GAME.**

In Simon Says you don't get any second chances. If you think or behave differently from Simon then you will be thrown out. Therefore, the person who advances is the person most like Simon. In the real world, we conform to Simon for any number of reasons. Perhaps it is to keep our job, to be promoted, or to be liked and accepted. Yet the message is clear, it is my way or the highway!

### **NEW LESSON #2**

#### **WARRIORS TAKE RISKS, WORRIERS ARE RISKS!**

## SIMON SAYS: SUCCESS STRATEGIES FOR THE ADULT PLAYGROUNDS OF LIFE

Being a Worrier is not something that many of us aspire to and yet so many of us excel at. We worry about our kids, about not having enough time in the day to do everything that needs to get done; about what people think of us. In fact, some of us even worry about worrying!

So many of us are so worried about making a mistake and trying to please the Simon's in our lives that we behave at times in ways which are counter to our own values. We begin to play it safe because we so worried about the consequences of some future event or worse; we are worried about something that has already happened. Worrying is a byproduct of fear, of being afraid that we cannot control everything that happens in our lives. To live with worry and fear robs us of our ability to live in the present moment, to control what is within our control.

Warriors on the other hand exert more control over events and decisions. It is not that Warriors never worry but rather they are focused on what is happening in the moment and are less concerned about what happened in the past which cannot be undone, or about the future which is unknown. Warriors realize that making mistakes is essential for their future success. If you are too afraid to think outside the box chances are good that you will end up trapped in it.

### **OLD LESSON #3**

#### **DO AS I SAY NOT AS I DO!**

One technique Simon uses to get people out of the game is to say one thing and do something completely different. This causes a great deal of confusion and leaves people feeling bitter.

As adults we often justify an inappropriate act or remark by saying to children, "Do as I say not as I do". We tell them not to smoke as we light another cigarette. No drinking and driving as we host parties and let our guests drive away drunk. And perhaps the one we hear most often is, "If you haven't anything nice to say than don't say anything at all". Imagine how different things would be if our actions and our words were consistent. After all, people remember what you do more than what you say.

### **NEW LESSON #3**

#### **SAY WHAT YOU MEAN, MEAN WHAT YOU SAY, AND DON'T SAY IT MEAN!**

At times we are quite aware that our words and our actions are inconsistent. As a result our credibility and others respect for us diminish. Yet there are other times when we are not aware of how our words are impacting others. We may not intend to confuse or offend anyone but still it happens.

An example of this is the distinction between what you intend and how your intentions impact others. Let's say that someone was to step on your foot and accidentally hurt you. Just because that person didn't intend to hurt you does not mean that your foot doesn't hurt. Even though you may appreciate the person apologizing to you, the fact remains is that your foot still hurts. When it is physical pain the example is much easier to understand than if the pain is emotional. If you direct negative comments towards someone long enough, the pain begins to accumulate so much that eventually they may lose their patience and blow up at you. This is critical in understanding why we must accept responsibility for our actions regardless of our intent.

### **OLD LESSON #4**

#### **JUST BECAUSE EVERYONE IS DOING THE SAME THING DOESN'T MAKE IT RIGHT!**

In Simon Says the orders are given so quickly that you have little time to react. When we are unsure of what to do, we often look towards others to see what they are doing and then do the same thing. It never occurs to us that they may not know what they are doing anymore than we do. It's the classic example of not knowing what direction you should go so you follow the herd of people who look like they know where they are going. We think, "This many people couldn't be wrong", so we follow them. At the same time, the people who taking the lead are thinking, "Well, we must be going in the right direction because so many people are following us". Often it takes far less energy to go along with the crowd than it does to think on your own or question the mass.

### **NEW LESSON #4**

#### **RESPOND VS REACT**

The difference between respond and react is thought. We have all had the experience of saying something

## SIMON SAYS: SUCCESS STRATEGIES FOR THE ADULT PLAYGROUNDS OF LIFE

reactively that if we had thought about it for a moment longer we would have said it differently or said nothing at all. The consequences for not thinking before we speak can have devastating results, perhaps the loss of a job or a friendship.

Therefore, we must slow the process down in order for us to be able to think, hence giving us the ability to respond in a way that we are proud of. One way to do this is to take a deep breathe. It is very simple but it is also very effective. Not only does it buy us time to slow the process down and think, but it also very calming.

When you get into situations which are challenging and are concerned you may react instead of respond, think of the letters B.A.R. These three letters represent words that can help you succeed in a stressful situation.

The letter B reminds us to BREATHE. Taking deep intentional breathes is one of the easiest and most effective ways to calm yourself down and reduce the stress you are feeling at that moment. It has a way of centering us which allows for a more thoughtful response. It also buys us some time to think instead of having a knee jerk reaction.

The second letter A, asks us to ACKNOWLEDGE what the other person is saying. If there is an environment where people are afraid of making one mistake and being thrown out of the game, acknowledging the different perspectives is essential for creating safety for varying viewpoints. Bear in mind that acknowledging someone else's perspective is not necessarily agreeing with it. You do not have to agree with what is being said. In fact, you can disagree, but in a manner in which they still feel as though you have heard their concerns. It is the old saying, "Seek to understand before being understood". Once someone feels heard they are much more likely to listen to what you have to say.

The last letter R is to RESPOND, not to react. A reaction erupts from our gut without filtering through our thought process first. It is much more emotional and visceral. Responding is a thoughtful action, one in which the person intentionally chooses their response. Decisions based on a thinking response will almost always be the better decision than one made from reaction.

However, too often when we are in stressful situations we do the process in reverse. Instead of Responding we REACT. When this occurs we usual say or do things we later regret. Secondly, instead of Acknowledging we ATTACK. We get defensive or feel we have been treated unfairly so we go on the offensive, resulting in the breakdown of communication. And finally, after attacking the person and ranting non-stop, we are so out of breath we must BREATHE.

Sometimes, relationships are tested through conflict. Coming out of conflict together does not always mean we agree with one another but rather that we understand one another's position. We are taught to believe that conflict is destructive and tears down relationships. The truth is, conflict, when dealt with appropriately, is an opportunity to enhance a relationship. It isn't the conflict we need to avoid but rather ineffective communication patterns. The best rule to follow is "Say what you mean, mean what you say and don't say it mean"!

Simon Says is a simple game with simple lessons. Learning how to replace old rules with new rules will enhance the quality of our relationships at home and work. Most of all, the game of Simon Says taught us to have fun and not to take the game too seriously, which is after all, is how we should live our lives.

Articles are provided for educational purposes and may be reprinted unaltered without prior permission, provided credit is given to the author as the source and the following paragraph is included. Notice of their use and publication, however, would be appreciated and can be sent to [info@TheDiversitySpeaker.com](mailto:info@TheDiversitySpeaker.com).

Dr. Maura Cullen is the author of "35 Dumb Things Well-Intended People Say: Surprising Things We Say That Widen the Diversity Gap". She is widely considered one of the nation's foremost authorities of diversity issues on college campuses today. Maura has over 25 years of experience as a keynote speaker and trainer. She earned her doctorate in Social Justice & Diversity Education from the University of Massachusetts, is a Founding Faculty member of the Social Justice Training Institute and Founder of the Diversity Student Summit. To learn more visit [www.TheDiversitySpeaker.com](http://www.TheDiversitySpeaker.com).