

No Excuses

There is no excuse for crime. Breaking into someone's business and stealing what isn't yours to satisfy a selfish desire is indefensible, regardless of age or circumstance. The idea that your wants or needs outweigh the rights of the person you're stealing from cannot be justified. It's dishonest, dishonorable, and ultimately causes more harm than good—to everyone involved.

There is no excuse. But there are reasons.

Too often, when crime strikes, our conversations focus on condemning the act rather than taking the time to consider what led to it in the first place.

This past weekend, two 16-year-old boys from Soap Lake broke into a marijuana shop and stole some product. They were caught, arrested, and taken into custody. The immediate response from most is that they got what they deserved. Maybe so. I won't argue that point. But my question is this: What led two teenage boys to risk their reputations, freedom, and future for a handful of short-term thrills?

Where were their parents? Presumably, they live at home, although that's not a given. Do we, as parents, know where our kids are and what they're doing? What kind of support system have these boys had growing up? And is it possible that this is part of a larger issue? In the past year alone, youth in Soap Lake have been caught driving drunk, overdosing on fentanyl, attempting suicide, vandalizing property, and now, breaking into a store for marijuana.

Where are the adults in their lives? How are the actions or inactions of adults affecting the development of these youth?

It's easy to sit behind a screen and call them foolish. To throw out lines like, *"If you want to do big-boy actions, you get big-boy consequences."* But who taught them how to be "big boys" in the first place?

What examples have they had? Has the revolving door of leadership in Soap Lake—city government, law enforcement, schools—provided them with a sense of stability? Unlikely. Has the local economy reassured them of a bright future? Doubtful. Perhaps they weren't paying attention to the lessons from their church youth groups, their mentors at the Boys and Girls Club, or their scout leaders... Oh, wait. Those things don't exist in Soap Lake.

Again, there is no excuse for crime. But what do we expect from kids who lack stability at home, in school, among their peers, and in the community?

If we, as adults, created more positive and consistent opportunities for them, could we prevent some of this behavior? If we chose to mentor instead of mock, could we guide them toward a better path? If parents paid closer attention and held themselves accountable, would fewer of our kids make reckless decisions?

What if, instead of celebrating the imprisonment of teenagers, we took a moment to ask whether the adults in this community are part of the problem?

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Youth are a product of their environment. So when situations like this arise, rather than simply condemning the offenders, shouldn't we take a long, hard look at the environment that continues to produce them?

It's true—the kids got what they deserved. But in light of the conditions that contributed to their actions, maybe the community did too.

While those boys sit in custody learning their lesson, will we take the time to learn ours?

Time will tell.

- Ryan Boldman
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