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## Partners Are Essential

By [Jill Berkowicz](#) and [Ann Myers](#) on **March 26, 2013 5:49 AM** | [No comments](#)

Leaders and their schools need partners in this business of educating society's youth and creating responsible, productive, creative and active citizens. Hopefully, these young people will possess values, conscience and courage as well. If we truly care about that whole description, we need partners.

We must have parents who want this also, who are responsible and will stand side by side with us. We must have clergy and community leaders who care enough to weave connections and develop moral conscience for the young and older alike. We must have a media that somehow contextualizes violence and cruelty as part of our lower selves rather than sensationalizes it as magnetic. We must have business leaders with a moral compass that is subject to scrutiny and hearts that are committed to community development rather than just personal gain. And, of course, we must have governmental leaders who have and showcase a moral compass in their decisions. Then maybe we can be successful. Without this the problems are too big for schools to handle and too significant for us to ignore. Consider this...

It was August last year and they were getting ready for school to open, marking the end of summer with parties and drinking aplenty. Probably there was music, laughter, and the throbbing of energy that only adolescents can create. They were young, life and world awaiting them. That night it changed. Identities shifted. They became perpetrators, bystanders, victims, photographers, the innocent or the guilty. Perhaps there were some who said "Hey stop, this isn't funny" or a few who called their parents to say "This is over the top, come get me." Maybe even a parent who asked a question or called one another but maybe not. The initial trial in the Steubenville, Ohio rape case concluded last week. The details emerging about that night are so despicable that they even brought one of the convicted young men to tears at sentencing.

If we thought it couldn't get worse, it did. Following the sentencing of the two boys, the [Washington Post](#) reported that the victim had received threatening tweets ("..to beat the s--- out of" the victim) from two teenage girls. The same Washington Post article reported that on the CNN commentary Poppy Harlow said to Candy Crowley, "It was incredibly emotional, incredibly difficult even for an outsider like me to watch what happened as these two young men that had such promising futures -- star football players, very good students -- we literally watched as ... their life fell apart." Well, Poppy this is how it happens. Those young men made very bad decisions, choices that victimized and humiliated another human being and they bragged about it. There must be consequences. The very thread of our society depends on it.

In his book *Moral Courage* published in 2006, Rushworth M. Kidder shares a story he called "The Day Nobody Called 911" in which a group of drunk teenagers, instead of taking action to help a boy who was hurt in a fight by calling 911, bundled him into a car and drove him to a hospital in order to lie about where he was hurt. He died 7 days later.

Kidder likens "group think" to bystander apathy and identifies it as posing a significant complication to moral courage. He says, "...the "groupthink" effect that causes a team to make decisions no one of its individuals would

have countenanced; the redefining of deviancy as normalcy, leaving no perceived moral wrong that must be courageously righted; and a misplaced sense of altruism that forces others to act with courage" (p.201). Kidder argues that moral courage can "be nurtured, taught, practiced, and attained..." (p.213).

So, what does this mean for leaders, especially given the fact that most of those involved in these incidents will be back in our schools? How do we clarify our part in solving the complex set of causes that lead to such horrific actions? One thing is for sure...we must have help. This calls for partners who share our concern and our purpose. These children belong to all of us. Perhaps, Steubenville will motivate some to join us in making children safe and allow courage and empathy to be victorious in the battle with the disconnection and selfish lack of concern which turns violent.

**Resource:**

Kidder, Rushworth M. (2006). *Moral Courage*. New York: Harper Collins.

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