

Skip the Comparison - Individuality is a Gift!

By Tom Massey, Ph.D.

In The Tassajara Bread Book Zen teacher Edward Espe Brown described a great truth that he learned from his kitchen practice. When Edward first started cooking, he couldn't get biscuits to come out the way they were supposed to. He would follow a recipe and try variations, but nothing worked. His biscuits just didn't measure up to the Bisquick and Pillsbury biscuits he made while growing up.

It didn't seem fair. Those biscuits of his youth were so easy to make. For the Bisquick, all you had to do was add milk in the mix and blob the dough in spoonfuls onto the pan – they didn't even need to be rolled out. The biscuits from Pillsbury came in a cardboard can. You just popped them open, put the pre-made biscuits on a pan, and baked them. They came out right every time. Now that's what biscuits were supposed to be like – Bisquick and Pillsbury.

Edward grew frustrated because, to his way of thinking, his biscuits never turned out right, even though the people who ate them would extol their virtues, eating one after another. In his mind, these perfectly good biscuits just weren't right, until one day Edward had an awakening, a real “ah-hah” experience, about his biscuits.

“Not right, compared to what?” he asked himself. All this time he had been trying to make canned biscuits. Then came the revelation of tasting his biscuits without comparing them to some preconceived standard. They were wheaty, flaky, buttery, light, and earthy. They were exquisitely alive – in fact, they were much more satisfying than any memory of canned biscuits.

A moment of liberation comes when you realize that your life is fine just as it is. Only the insidious comparison to a neatly scripted, beautifully packaged product, made it seem insignificant or insufficient. You may have spent years striving to look “perfect”, always calm, directed, energetic, and collected. Trying to produce a Bisquick life – with no dirty bowls, no messy feelings, or hindrances, can be a frustrating experience. Effective leaders possess the wisdom to appreciate and celebrate individuality.

Are you a Bisquick leader? Always trying to fit yourself and others into a neatly packaged plan. Or are you willing to allow people to cook their own biscuits from scratch? Standards are fine. We need them to ensure continuity and quality of performance. But individuals also need a sense of independence without constantly being compared to or expected to perform exactly as others. Rigid standards lead to frustration and loss of creativity. Give yourself and others permission to be unique.