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Who are RED & BLACK and why are we here?

 So tell me ... now that we've been offered this opportunity to write a monthly column for the Jewish Herald-Voice, what exactly are we supposed to write about? I know that getting us to talk isn't a problem, especially since I tend to blah-blah-blah. And certainly when we recently spoke at Temple Sinai no one seemed to mind when we went off on tangents. Since they asked so many questions during the Q&A session, maybe we should just ask them for suggestions.

It is a little late for that, our deadline is tomorrow. What do you think people would want to know about us? 

 Why do you always answer my questions with questions? It's frustrating. And, yes, I know the answer is Q-I-D (ask Questions, to get Information, to make intelligent, conscious Decisions) but my question's due to the fact a column's supposed to be written by REAL columnists! And, I don't even think of us as authors, more like stenographers!

Using your logic, although we formed a publishing company to publish our book, we are not publishers, either. 

 Exactly! Even after "teaching" for 12 weeks at KIPP, I can tell you that I definitely don't think of us as teachers. So, what exactly are we?

Real people. You are too concerned with titles and descriptions. Do you remember when I first mentioned financial statements to you and used the term "assets and liabilities?" 

 Yes, I freaked out because I didn't think I could deal with all those financial terms, but once I realized all it meant was "what you own," vs. "what you owe," I calmed down and was able to focus on things. But, what does that have to do with writing a column?

Stop focusing on the "columnist" title and think about "Why are we here?" 

DISCLAIMER: We are real people. We are not claiming to be experts in any given field, but rather are becoming experts of our own lives.

 That's easy. Just like that day at KIPP when they asked us if we could develop and "teach" a financial literacy program for the entire spring semester, and your reply was "Not a problem!" We're here because you tend to get us into these situations. I know people have told us our book and our stories are amusing and informative, but this is a column in a JEWISH newspaper. Although we're Jewish, let's face it, we're not very religious. We don't go to synagogue, we're not even members of a temple, and although I was Bat Mitzvahed, I don't remember much of what I learned. I don't think knowing the difference between Rosh Hashanah and Chanukah makes me Jewish. What makes us qualified to write for the Jewish Herald-Voice?

I appreciate that our book does not have any "overt Jewish content," as one of the N.Y. Jewish media pointed out so succinctly. I also understand what you are saying about us not being "actively practicing Jews." However, it is our values that make us Jewish. Remember, even Michael Berry commented when he interviewed us on his radio show, "It's interesting, reading your 12 commandments, any rabbi or pastor could have written this." Everything we do is, or at least should be, driven by our values and priorities. And, since you love to look backwards, everything can be traced back to our childhood and being raised in a Jewish home. And, do not forget the emphasis that Jews place on education. 

 No kidding! After all, it was at a Jewish Federation's Women's Breakfast Club that we were asked, "Why aren't the lessons in your book taught in schools?!" The question, provoked some very lively conversation and ultimately led us to KIPP. I also remember your response was something along the lines of, "How would I know? I am not an educator."

Famous last words - however, we all agreed that an education is the most valuable asset anyone will ever possess. No one can take it away from you, it does not depreciate and the more you use it the more valuable it becomes. Asking questions is how you learn. And it is not just the answers that are important, but also the process. I know mom used to drive you crazy with all her questions, but she, too, was trying to teach you how to learn. However, when parents and spouses do it, it somehow seems annoying. 

 And, sisters! When I first turned to you after Nick got fired, I wanted answers and sympathy. You gave me neither. But, I have to admit you did eventually force me to realize I had the ability to not only learn about personal finances, but also to better understand how my values should affect those decisions. (Not to mention tackling the mountain of paper in my workroom and dealing with the fact that there truly aren't enough hours in the day!) I know it sounds obvious, but sometimes I get so wrapped up in day-to-day details that I forget the big picture.

We all do. Sometimes it takes a crisis to make us remember. Other times it may be a difficult decision, for example, when I decided to print our book in the U.S. although it cost twice as much as printing overseas. (The sentence "Printed in the USA" is definitely the most expensive one I will ever print!) But my point is, we were both raised with a strong set of fundamental values as to what is right. And, what is truly important. Unfortunately, the "right" road is not always the "easy" road. 

 But, what do we do if our basic beliefs get temporarily "forgotten?"

You find something that works for you as a reminder - for me it is the Make-a-Wish 



RED + BLACK
real sisters. real life.

Tina "Red" Pennington and Mandy "Black" Williams are sisters and co-authors of "What I Learned About Life When My Husband Got Fired!" The informative, entertaining book discusses values, priorities, relationships, financial literacy and much more.

UPCOMING APPEARANCES

- Sept. 11 - 1-3 p.m. Whole Foods - Sugar Land
- Sept. 23 - 6-7:30 p.m. Girl Scouts Program Place for Girls (Only Open to Alumnae)
- Sept. 24 - 10:30-noon Tootsies
- Sept. 26 - 4-6 p.m. Congregation Beth Shalom of the Woodlands
- Sept. 28 - 6-8 p.m. Memorial Hermann - Sugar Land

For an up-to-date listing of all upcoming public appearances, as well as details on these, go to "Future Appearances" at redandblackbooks.com.

Foundation. For some people it is as simple as a screensaver on their computer or a picture in their wallet. For others, it is attending religious services either on a regular basis or maybe celebrating a holiday.

 Are you suggesting I attend temple on Rosh Hashanah? Don't you think that would be hypocritical since I haven't been to temple for years?

Although the New Year is the perfect time to get back to basics, I was merely trying to help you find answers to your questions. 

 Oh. Well, at least now I can see where it's our values and priorities that make us "Jewish," so maybe we're not totally out of place in a Jewish newspaper after all. ■