Editor's Notes IUJSL Volume 5 Issue 1 Fall 2015

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The Editor’s Notes

I admit I am a gym rat. It is not unusual for people I know at the gym where I work out to know what time it is when I walk in the door. Each day, before I begin my work out, I walk through the free-weight area strip the leg press machines, the Smith Squat Rack, benches, and incline presses of the weights that have been left on and re-rack those weights. I pick up the weights that have been left on floor and re-rack them, as well as the dumb bells that lay strewn across the area. It is not unusual to see leg press machines with more than ten 45 pound plates left on or incline press stations with 3 plates on each side. What is normal is that despite the signs on the mirrors requesting members to “please re-rack your weights”, people hit the weight room, load up the machines or benches they are using, and when finished with their repetitions, walk off to the next exercise leaving the weights. Anybody who has been to a Gold’s Gym, a L.A. Fitness, or a “Y” is all too familiar with this scene.

So each day I walk through the free weight area before I start my routine. I make small talk with those I know and go about the business of re-racking the weights. I take in the people working out and begin to realize how diverse they are. They are from all over the world. Languages from Eastern Europe to Pan-Asia resonate on cell phones. They represent all socio-economic classes. They are professional classes, working classes, faculty and graduate students, and retirees. They are from all income levels and life-styles. They share apartments, live in opulent houses, span sexual-orientations, and more. And they have in common coming to the gym on their schedule to keep themselves fit as they define it.

As I begin to re-rack the machines and benches that been had used, some look at me and, perhaps, feel a bit uncomfortable. There are some who begin to re-rack and I find continue to do so each time they come to the gym. But most just leave their weights, even as they watch me strip down other machines and benches next to the ones they are on. They are used to me “cleaning up”. I don’t mean to make anyone feel uncomfortable nor do I suggest to anyone that they should re-rack their weights. There are many times, in fact, that I enjoy straightening up. It’s concrete and when the room is done it is so much easier to do a workout routine. Still, people come into the cleaned-up space, use the machines and leave their weights, and I continue to strip the machines between my sets until I am finished with my workout and leave for the day.

I do get comments as I strip the machines. “They ought to pay you for your work!” “I bet you’re getting in an extra work out.” “You’re the only one I see doing this. People here are such slobs!” Just recently there was a young woman who wanted to use one of the leg machines. Both were free and both were laden with 45 pound plates. She just stood looking at them. I walked up and began stripping one of the machines and re-racking the weights. She asked me if I was going to use that machine. I told her no. I just had a thing about keeping the room a bit

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straightened up. She looked at me; then grabbed the weights she wanted to use. I went to the
next leg machine to strip that one. And before I finished, the young woman had finished her sets
and left, leaving the machine loaded with the weights she used. A graduate student came up to
me after and said that he always tries to remember to re-rack his weights and asked me why do I
do this every time I come in?

It is an interesting question. My yoga instructor always reminds us, after shavasana, to take what
we have “learned on the mat” with us into what we will do that day. I wondered what would
happen is each of us cleaned our part of this “community” we called the gym for the next person
coming whom we will never meet and never know. Could we learn to be more mindful from
simply taking but a few moments to re-rack the weights we use. Certainly, the “community
space” in which we do our routines would be better for all of us if each of us did something so
simple. In doing this, would we learn be more caring of the space we use and leave for others?
Could we take that lesson “from the mat” with us into our day-to-day lives and be mindful of that
in all that we would do that day?

I do wonder what would we happen if each of us just cleaned our part in this little community of
the gym. We would be exercising our empathetic consideration? And isn’t this the grounding of
servant leadership? In thinking about this, I realized that I was bringing what I hoped I was
teaching through service-learning with me into my day-to-day. Isn’t this what we hope our
students will “take from the mat” when they do service-learning?

As for the question that the graduate student asked me, I answered simply that I was just trying
to be a good neighbor. He nodded his head. He smiled a bit. And perhaps…well maybe.

So remember. After you finish your workout, please re-rack your weights!

--Ned Scott Laff--

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