

Inadvertently becoming the change you wish to see in the world

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(Note: The quote is fake, by the way.)

It's the Labor Day holiday in the United States, so instead of technical content, I'm going to share this story.¹ You can hear it in Melinda Gates' own words, but here's a transcript, with some clarifying words added by me.

When our oldest daughter, who was then four [years old], fifteen years ago, it was time for her to go to preschool. Bill and I completely knew exactly where. We agreed as a couple, we wanted our daughter to go [to that school] from preschool to fifth grade.

He was CEO of Microsoft, and I was at home at that point, with two children, but I could see for me the amount of driving [required]. It was going to be thirty minutes each way every day to take her to the school way away from our house, and I said to Bill, “Well, let’s wait. Let’s just wait two more years, and in first grade, we’ll put her first grade to fifth, and [in the meantime] we’ll put her instead in our neighborhood school.”

And he said, “No no no, let’s start her now.”

And I said, “It’s too much driving.”

And he said, “Well, it’s so important to me, Melinda, I will drive her two days a week.” That meant forty-five minutes of driving [for him] because it went away from our house, back past our house, back to Microsoft.

So he started doing this two days a week. Well, two weeks into school, there was this huge fuss amongst the women in the classroom, the moms, and I said, “What’s going on?”

And they said, “We’ve all gone home and said to our husbands, ‘If Bill Gates, the CEO of Microsoft, is driving his daughter to school, you darned well better drive our kids to school.’”

And I was actually kind of angry at that point, because I thought, “Well, I just negotiated this with Bill. It was what was right for me.” But it created a cultural change. We didn’t expect that to happen, but you know what? A lot more dads started showing up with their kids at school.

And that’s what I mean about public change. You do it in your home, but then you actually role model it. and for us it was kind of indirect, we didn’t mean to be, but it was the right thing for us as a couple, and it ended up being the right thing for that school.

I was talking with a colleague of mine, and it turns out that we both volunteered to be the class parent for our respective kid’s elementary school classes. The class parent is usually the mother of one of the students, and a lot of the materials sent to the class parents simply assume that the class parents is one of the mothers.

¹ It sounds like I’m shilling for the boss, but nobody asked me to do this. I just like the story.

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