

Bill Rea ? What message to kids?

As the proverb goes, 'The road to hell is paved with good intentions.'

There was a story that raised a bit of fuss late last week.

A teacher somewhere in the Greater Toronto Area sent Grade 8 students home with a drama assignment. Apparently, the kids were supposed to act like they were addicted to a drug. But the assignment apparently included detailed instructions on how to make and use crystal meth, including a list of ingredients.

I can see there might be some benefit in having young people explore the world of drugs, even those which are potentially dangerous. There might be some logic to the idea that the more they know about something that's dangerous, the better the chance that they will try to avoid it. And I think we have to grant there was a certain amount of creativity in coming up with such an assignment. We're always hearing people urging others to 'think outside the box.'

But as has often been said, the message is important. That includes two components: Who's giving and who's receiving the message. And in this case, it's important to be mindful of who's on the receiving end. Are Grade 8 students really the people who should be given the message on how to manufacture a substance like crystal meth?

I once read an interview with G. Gordon Liddy. It was in the early 1980s in an issue of Playboy (my aunt bought my father a subscription to Playboy for Christmas for years, and my dad never had a problem with me reading it, or looking at the pictures). For the benefit of those who are not familiar with the man, Liddy is a retired radio talk show host in Washington D.C., although I understand his show was syndicated to a broader audience (I never got to hear it). But he got his start on the road to fame and fortune as a lawyer, then FBI agent and eventually working on the committee that was set up in 1972 to facilitate the re-election of President Richard Nixon. Liddy helped organize and command the infamous Watergate break-in. Unlike some of his colleagues, he did not talk to the authorities about the incident. He believed he was acting like a good soldier and accepted his prison sentence without a fuss. His autobiography *Will* is highly recommended reading.

The interview I referred to came out as sort of a promotion for his autobiography.

Liddy spoke at some length about his training, especially in the intelligence field (which is what he was doing on Nixon's campaign), and ways to deal with certain opponents 'with extreme prejudice,' meaning killing them.

He mentioned there was one person he was expecting orders to deal with, and he had been pondering how to do the job, if it actually did land on his plate (it apparently never did). The method he said was going to be employed was to mug the target, an occurrence that was fairly commonplace in Washington. In this case, they would make sure the mugging was lethal.

But he mentioned other methods that could be used to kill people. For example, he said a person who really knew what he or she was doing could easily kill someone with a pencil. There was a special technique involved. He also said he knew how to take several cigars and extract enough pure nicotine that a few drops in a victim's drink could take that person out permanently.

In both of those cases, Liddy refused to elaborate further, fearing a rash of killings with pencils or nicotine poisonings in the country's high schools. He granted that high school students might not be likely to read interviews in Playboy, evidently saving their attention for other parts of the publication. But he didn't want to take chances. The point is he grasped the real nature of the beast.

Which leads us to wonder about the case currently going on with kids being given information on how to make crystal meth.

It must be stressed that we have very little in the way of determining how true this is. As far as I know, we've only heard from the mother of one of the kids, and there are also reports that the teacher involved has been suspended with pay while this matter is being investigated. There's also the assumption that the list of ingredients given to the kids can actually result in the manufacture of crystal meth (I'm not qualified to make any assertions). Time will tell in this case, but we have to be mindful of the possible consequences.

I believe Liddy was on the mark. There are plenty of examples.

Scarcely a week goes by that we don't read or hear of some incident in some high school in which some kid has been stabbed, or a young person has been busted for being in possession of a gun, etc. There has been bullying in schools probably since they invented schools. True, there is greater awareness now, but I can't believe the problem is going to disappear any time soon. I hate to seem cynical, but I believe I will not live to see the day that bullying will be obsolete.

So God knows what kind of situations can develop when certain kids get hold of recipes to make certain substances.

Assuming the worst-case scenario, if a teacher can get hold of a recipe for crystal meth, then it stands to reason that any tech-savvy kid can do the same. I don't think that's the message we want them getting from a teacher.

