

# Why Should We Have An Awareness of Those Around Us

**Rev Ben Arcus**

This term we are focusing on the second pillar of the good Rathkeale Man – having an awareness of those around you.

But you might well ask the question: why should I? Why shouldn't I just focus on myself?

Well the answer to that is: you should. Unless you have a strong sense of self (which we have talked about last term when we looked at the first pillar), you cannot relate well to others without the fear of losing your identity.

So let me tell you what having an Awareness of Others is not:

It's not conforming to what others think. There can be a lot of pressure at your age to fit in. I know that you all have an awareness of what others around you think about what is cool and what is not. On a non-uniform day at any school in the country or probably around the world, you will find that there are actually lots of 'uniforms' being worn on those days – uniforms of many different tribes that people fit in with. When I was a teenager, I wore a 'uniform' like that too: mine was the grunge uniform of the 90's.

But in order to be really free and really ourselves, we need to break out of conformity, and become our own person, able to pursue our own definition of success and happiness for our lives. That's what the film *Dead Poet's Society* is all about. It captures a time in history (the 1950's and early 60's) when society was very repressive. The message of the film was all about having freedom to express yourself the way you are. That is an important stage that all of us must reach in order to become an adult.

But being free and a fully expressed individual is not the final achievement in our growth as human beings. Individual success, while an important step, is not the final goal in our search for happiness.

Here's an actual photo of me after winning an argument with my wife. While that's obviously a joke, it makes an important point. We can win an argument, we can be right, we can be sorted, we can be successful, we can have it all together. But if I end up alone or destroying our relationships in the process, then what's the point? Because other people make life worthwhile. And actually, no one achieves anything truly alone – we all depend on others.

My wife and I recently got very hooked on *Drive to Survive* – the Netflix series that follows the Formula One racing teams. There are only 20 Formula One drivers in the world at any one time. So those guys are very special people. And they could feel very arrogant about being in the top 20 in the world. What I think impressed me the most is that the best drivers – guys like Lewis Hamilton, who won the world championship seven times – are very humble. And when they win a race, they say "congratulations guys we did it." They understand that they are part of a team, and that without their team they could never get to perform at the level that they do.

That's what comes after individual success – is realising that unless we all succeed together, then success can feel empty and lonely. A few years ago a book came out called "The Spirit Level" that analysed the countries with the happiest people in them,

and discovered that countries that are more equal – where the gaps between the rich and the poor are smaller – are countries where everyone is happier and healthier. Even the wealthy are happiest in countries where the gaps between rich and poor are smaller.

Does this mean that we can't be rich? That we shouldn't aim for success, or that we shouldn't try and improve our lives? No, not at all. As I have said, personal freedom and success is the foundation. But the next step is realising that we are also one human race, and that if we fear that our success may come at the cost of the happiness of others, then this lowers our happiness too.

What does this mean for you, at college? It means we shouldn't try and achieve our own success by putting others down. In fact, the most successful students I have seen, and by successful, I include being popular – the best ones I have seen don't try and lift themselves up by putting others down. Bullies ride high for a time as juniors. But they end up pretty unpopular by the time they are seniors. And they fare even worse after they leave school, when people start to outgrow the idea that popularity is what matters.

The greatest students I have seen are the ones who lift everyone up, and exclude no one. I could rattle off a long list of names of boys over the years who I have seen who exhibit this kind of greatness. James Church and Andrew Taylor come to mind immediately. When they lifted up others around them, they lifted themselves up too. I know a lot of you senior boys do it too. I think you junior boys have some good role models for what it means to have an awareness of those around you.

And it's what this planet needs right now. It's always needed, but when times are getting tougher, when there seems to be division and conflict all around us, I am encouraged by the fact that there is a generation of young people who are living not just for their own personal success but who want us all to succeed together. Because I think that until we all start succeeding together, none of us can really be the person we are meant to be.