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Alum Kolbe tells IMC students her "System" helps people trust their instincts

by Liz McCulloch, IMC04

Kathy Kolbe (BSJ61) returned to Medill on Oct. 20 to explain her definition of success: the freedom to be yourself.

"Let me tell you something about yourselves," Kolbe said during an IMC Brown Bag lecture. "You're perfect. There is something about you that doesn't need to change or improve, but most of us don't know it because no one has ever told us."

Kolbe is the creator of the Kolbe System, a program that she said helps identify and unleash natural instincts. Kolbe argues that instead of constantly trying to change problem-solving skills, people should instead identify which of their instincts are strongest and benefit from them.

Kolbe said that 80 percent people haven't discovered their true abilities. Most don't know what they are good at and instead dwell on what they do wrong. She claims the confusion starts as early as parent-teacher conferences when children are bombarded with self-improvement demands.

"Our instincts don't need to change," Kolbe said. "And it's been the biggest secret in the academic world. If we just keep performing how we are, know who we are and how we operate and we don't try change, we can build on that talent."

The Kolbe System identifies people as one of four types of "action modes": the fact finder, who is detail-oriented and justifies; a follow-through personality, who is organized and adapts or rearranges; a quick starter enjoys dealing with innovations and revises or improvises; and the implementer can construct or renovate tools, technology and equipment.

Kolbe said most preschool teachers are implementers, while high school teachers are fact finders. She claims the difference between primary and secondary teaching explains why children are diagnosed with attention deficit disorder late in their academic careers, because high school classes are based only on tests and don't enable students to use all of their natural skills.



Kathy Kolbe (BSJ61) discussed the Kolbe System to IMC students in the McCormick Tribune Center forum

“I think we are abusing children in classrooms in America every day,” Kolbe said. “We further abuse them by drugging them to manage their behavior so they don’t have the freedom to be themselves. Classrooms are not accepting of anything other than the way teachers deem and the way the system works.”

Kolbe said older students are conditioned not to solve problems creatively like they did in childhood. She said biased school assessment instruments are also part of the problem: fact finders design standardized tests, such as the SAT, so only fact finding students who think the same way will be able to score well.

“There may be 10 ways to solve a problem and each are equally important, but school systems only celebrate a few,” Kolbe said. “It is so important that kids give themselves credit when they are truly being their authentic selves.”

Kolbe introduced the conclusions she came to in her latest book, "Powered by Instincts: Five Rules for Trusting Your Guts." "Rules" gives suggestions on how to get in touch and preserve forgotten instincts. Kolbe advised not to commit to too many things at once, to be obstinate when others attempt to change a natural way of working and to “do nothing” when instincts don’t kick in.

"Doing nothing is not permission to be lazy," Kolbe said. "It’s permission to pay attention when your instincts don’t have the answer."

Kolbe said people should commit all energy and talents to the classes, activities, relationships and career endeavors.

“We need to spend less time thinking and more time doing, being and creating," she said. "That is the power of our human nature and of our instincts.”