

Authority in the Chicken Line

Christian Archibald Herter (1895 – 1966) was an American politician and statesman who became the 59th governor of Massachusetts from 1953 to 1957. Two years later, he served as the U.S. Secretary of State from 1959 to 1961.

In those capacities, and others, he served with considerable authority.

On one occasion, when he was running hard for a second term as governor, he arrived at a church barbecue. It was late afternoon, and Herter was famished.

As he moved down the serving line, he held out his plate to the woman serving chicken. She put a piece on his plate, and turned to the next person in line.

“Excuse me,” Governor Herter said, “do you mind if I have another piece of chicken?”

“Sorry,” the woman told him. “I’m supposed to give one piece of chicken to each person.”

“But I’m starved,” the governor said.

“Sorry,” the woman said again. “Only one to a customer.”

Governor Herter was a modest and unassuming man, but he decided that this time he would throw a little weight around.



“Do you know who I am?” he said. “I am the governor of this state.”

“Do you know who I am?” the woman responded. “I’m the lady in charge of the chicken. Move along, mister.”

We can chuckle at this story, but the chicken server had been delegated authority, and she intended to use it.

Merriam-Webster defines authority as “power to influence or command thought, opinion or behavior.”

Throughout life, we must deal with the matter of authority. Sometimes we find ourselves in positions of authority, whether as a supervisor, a parent or an officer of a church or some organization. Most of the time, we are required to submit to authority, as an employee, a child or a citizen of a city, state or country.

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Wisdom regarding authority is a virtue often lacking. Some with authority may do poorly, even abusing their position, and people under authority don't always handle it gracefully, making matters worse.

The Bible instructs that those in authority should judge righteously, be free of evil influence (such as covetousness or bribery) and be fair and merciful, particularly for the poor and needy and for those who are unable to speak for themselves.

Those who exercise authority wisely earn respect and admiration from those they lead and beyond.

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God (Romans 13:1 ESV).

– Beecher Hunter