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The Younger, The Wiser

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Young people really do know it all. They are optimistic, enthusiastic and passionate about making the world a better place.

Their reflections were magical at the first annual Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center's Speakers Idol. My Co-judges, Sarah Taylor of MuchMusic and Rick Campenelli of ET Canada, were overtaken with enthusiasm by the honesty, conviction and the remarkable world view of the 17 finalists who competed to be FSWC's Speaker Idol of the year.

To make the world a better place, many of the students believed one needs to start with oneself. They recalled the age-old wisdom that the central pillar of transformation is self-awareness. Ghandi's famous assertion to be the change you want to see in others was invoked time and again.

One student intelligently argued that "morals" need to be taught at school like other subjects. She astutely reflected upon our skewed measure of success -- "intelligence does not make a person good" she said. "If we understand problems are caused by people," we must have a mandatory education system focused on justice and human rights.

Hitler was a charismatic orator, but used his talent for the sake of evil, reflected another student. In modern times, the greatest way of educating masses of people to recognize evil and do something about it argued the students is through film and social media.

The students talked extensively about bullying, about being bullied and about standing up to bullies. They talked about making choices, going their own way and of finding positive role models. Some took pride in their schools and in their communities who were molding them to become our future leaders.

At no other time in human history has information been so accessible. The digital age has created a generation of young adults who are concerned about water shortages, poverty, disease and war. Many told us about the soup kitchens in which they volunteer and the help missions to other countries they participated in.

They implored us and one another to perform random acts of kindness, treat each other with kindness and compassion and to care just a little more. They encouraged us to "break out of survival mode" and to "live, love and laugh" a little more.

The world can be a great place if we only listen to our young people and harness their energy. "It's what you do, not what you own," said one student. I could not agree more. The future looks good.