

Sincere Charity, the Power of the Gentle Hand

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*The paper looks at why organizations need to focus on acting in charitable and sincere ways. Their efforts help their bottom line as much as anything else. Companies that simply see publicity of their “good deeds” miss the point entirely. Hamas suicide operations within the Palestinian population were once frowned upon. It is the social work and charities that Hamas carries out that wins the hearts and minds of their people. Leadership today requires courage, communication, and caring. Robert Foley, President and Chief Executive Officer of Parsippany, says they “need to **establish a culture of caring** and give people the feeling that they can express themselves comfortably in an out-of-box kind of way.” Being charitable is not only the right thing to do, it is the only reasonable thing to do.*

INTRODUCTION

Ever notice how a lot of corporate and personal charity seems to be more self-serving than anything else? I live in a town where a well-to-do mover and shaker donates newspapers to kids in some of the poorer parts of town. Every one of those papers has a gold seal that says, “Donated by...” (I won’t give him the satisfaction of mentioning his name here.) Oh, yes, he has a larger-than-life statue of himself erected outside one of his business complexes. Anything he gives or does, he then puts his name on it. My question is why does he have to announce his generosity?

Contrast his approach to the “secret Santa” of Kansas City fame. For 26 years, he remained anonymous. He has spontaneously given away millions to needy individuals. Only in the fall of 2006 did he reveal his identity because he had cancer and was dying. He wanted to use what time he had left to make a plea to others to continue the philosophy of “random acts of kindness.”

TRY LIVING ON A MINIMUM WAGE

Religions and even terrorist organizations have long known of the power of charity as a way to endear those around them. It is about time that business and everyday leaders wake up to its power. It can be a cold world out there if you think no one cares. Mary Ellison is a Health Education and Wellness Coordinator for a Midwest city of about 250,000. She says, “The biggest thing to me is the disparities between the ‘haves’ and ‘have nots.’ We are the wealthiest, most powerful nation in the world, and we have folks that are starving, folks that don’t have access to health care, don’t have access to good, healthy food, or the ability to care for their families in a way that we would hope and expect. We have folks in our community that live without utilities, and there was a place—I believe it is no longer there—where people didn’t have floors, they had to sleep on dirt floors, right here in our town.

“Those are the kinds of things that happen in any community that I think are ‘under the rock.’ Certainly, there are people who are not going to work. They may not be prepared in any way, shape, or form to work. I don’t know what we will do about those folks. But, by and large, I think most people would like to have something that they can do to take care of their families, to take care of their children, to take care of themselves, in some way that is not degrading and in some way that they can feel pretty good about themselves and we just don’t have lots of opportunities for folks to do that.

“It is true that we have an awful lot of folks that need to just pull themselves up out of this, but we live in a very different world. It is expensive to live; it is cheaper to eat unhealthy food than it is to eat healthy food. It’s cheaper for me to go buy a Snickers bar than it is for me to go buy a big fat apple sometimes, and that’s definitely not a good thing. Those are the kinds of things that discourage me in my bones.”

Ellison says, “I think that we basically have a system where we have a minimum wage that makes it difficult to live. Business and industry, in general, does not want to raise the minimum wage because they say it will cut into their profit margin or people will not buy as much. I have a hard time with that, only because it seems like companies and health care providers seem to be doing okay, better than okay in some instances. It seems to be okay, on the other hand, to have people trying to make a living, trying to take care of themselves on \$7.00 an hour or \$5.30 an hour, which I think minimum wage is, it’s \$5.30 or \$5.50, something like that. I think we need to do something about leveling out the playing field.

“If you are making minimum wage and you don’t have health insurance and you don’t have sick time, if you’re sick or somebody in your family is sick and you take the day off, you lose that pay. To go to the doctor, it costs you \$70.00 or \$100.00 and some, depending on what the deal is, and then if you’ve got medication, it could be much more than that. So you’re doing the right thing, but you’re going backwards, and it’s a no-win situation, and that happens to an awful lot of people. We have to work almost a week, or a little over a week, I think it is, if you’re on minimum wage, to afford the average reasonable apartment or house here in Springfield. That’s an awful lot of time.”

CHARITY IS NOT PR

President Hoover, in the 1930s, said the country was about to turn the corner. Millions were losing their homes and unable to pay rent or mortgages. Hoover and others of the wealthy class sort of missed the point of compassion. The International Apple Shippers’ Association had overstocked apples so they decided to sell its vast surplus to unemployed men on credit so that they could resell them on street corners for a nickel apiece. Hearing this, Hoover boasted, “Many people have left their jobs for the more profitable one of selling apples.” Henry Ford, whose company had put 75,000 men out of work and on the road as “hoboes” said those thousands of wandering men, women, and children were getting “The best education in the world for those boys, that traveling around! They get more experience in a few months than they would in years at school.” J. P. Morgan himself believed that there were 25 or 30 million families in the “leisure class” who were able to employ a servant. He was shocked to learn that there were fewer than two million servants in the entire country (Davis, 2003, p. 346).

Such lack of sincere caring is not restricted to our distant past. Remember Hurricane Katrina; there was a relief concert on MTV. The MTV logo was on the screen during the entire telecast; seems a bit self-serving, doesn’t it? Rapper Eminem was on the phone announcing he’d made a \$200,000 contribution through his record company. Perhaps it was not meant as a publicity stunt, but it seemed like it to me. So why do so many famous, well-to-do people announce their generosity and, oh yes, tell you the amount. I guess perhaps they just want to lead by example. Any doubts I have about the motives of individuals are dwarfed when it comes to corporate America.

Chuck Simmins monitors stingy donations from big companies, and named some companies that had made donations as a gesture of good corporate citizenship (<http://blog.simmins.org/Katrina/ameraidamer.html>). Here is where good old American marketing takes over. He said he noticed at the bottom of a release from Proctor and Gamble this blurb, “Two billion times a day, P&G brands touch the lives of people around the world.” The company has one of the strongest portfolios of trusted, quality

leadership brands, including Pampers[®], Tide[®], Ariel[®], Always[®], Whisper[®], Pantene[®], Bounty[®], Dawn[®], Pringles[®], Folgers[®], Charmin[®], Downy[®], Lenor[®], Iams[®], Crest[®], Actonel[®], Olay[®], Head & Shoulders[®], and Wella[®]. Procter and Gamble were not alone; many others did the same thing. O.K., I know this is normal stuff that goes on the end of a press release, but what does that have to do with giving relief to hurricane victims?

It doesn't have to take too suspicious a mind to look into the thoughts of marketing executives to see them think that whenever a company does something good, that they should make sure everyone knows! But those people, corporations, and politicians that see good deeds as an opportunity, that see charity as a good "photo op," miss the point. It seems more callous than caring. It is vanity and it proves even corporations can say, "What's in it for me?"

CHARITY CREATES TRUST

The United States government provides the smallest aid outlay as a percentage of GDP (Zakaria, 2005). Charity starts with humanity. People are not a means to an end; they are the end. Governmental, individual, or corporation's success is built, in large part, on the **trust** it can create. It is your total body of work; it is how you act day in and day out that builds trust. Wal-Mart was one of those corporations that got some positive spin from their handling of Hurricane Katrina. PR experts for Wal-Mart, which include many seasoned veterans of political campaigns, now run a new office at the Wal-Mart headquarters. It is dubbed "Action Alley." Their purpose is to soften its public face. The team, backed by Wal-Mart's own publicity staff, responds within hours of any new criticism. It is all about spinning the right stories.

Action Alley got lucky; within a few weeks on the job, the media noticed their efficient relief efforts following the New Orleans devastation. It is all about business. H. Lee Scott Jr., Wal-Mart's CEO, said, "When growth was easier, this idea of critics simply being ignored was O.K. [But] as the share price slows, you have to get to this point" (Berner, 2005). He says the company has to continue to evolve in how they interface with society. I hope so.

The company lost a lawsuit alleging that supervisors forced employees to work off the clock. They settled another about its contractors using illegal immigrants. They are still engaged in a massive class-action suit that states that they discriminate against female employees in pay and promotions. So you have to ask this charitable Wal-Mart, is it all about image-enhancement, or is it true charity? Do they walk the talk? It is a matter of trust.

Wal-Mart's progress in the sweatshop front is another example of an opportunity to build trust. They can learn a thing or two from Nike and Gap. More than a decade ago, Nike was hit with sweatshop allegations. At first, they tried to give a quick PR fix, but soon they realized they would actually have to make real management changes. They now submit supplier's factories to random inspections by independent labor monitors. Wal-Mart currently uses in-house monitoring, which prevents outsiders from verifying reforms (Berner, 2005).

A GOOGLE PHILOSOPHY - DON'T BE EVIL

Perhaps many corporations could take a lesson from Google whose corporate motto is, "Don't be evil." Google is not the normal \$6.3 billion company. Larry Page and Sergey Brin, the men who created the Internet Search engine, try to create a different corporation. Their efforts at philanthropy include a commitment of 1 percent of Google's equity and profits to charitable causes and good deeds. That amounts to about \$1 billion (that's one thousand million) over the next 20 years. Brin and Page looked at challenges unusually broad for a company to tackle, such as poverty and the environment. Brin wants the company to be ambitious. He said, "We want to be bold—we want to make a difference" (LaGesse, 2005). I guess only time will tell, but it seems like they are thinking beyond the PR perspective.

Being successful and gaining trust takes more than photo ops. It is created by deeds, not words. Many corporations and executives could learn a thing or two from terrorists.

USING THE HAMAS EXAMPLE

On November 21, 2001, Palestinian gunmen killed three Israelis in two shootings, one in Afula, a town in Israel, and the other in the Gaza strip. The attack was revenge for an Israeli Army landmine that killed five Palestinian schoolchildren in Gaza the week before and for Israel's assassination on November 23rd of Hamas's military leader, Mahmoud Abu Hanoud.

Hamas claimed responsibility for the attacks. Hamas suicide operations within the Palestinian population were once frowned upon. Now most view the killing of civilians in Israel as a legitimate response to Israel's killing of civilians in the West Bank and Gaza. But that is not the whole story behind their acceptance and admiration. It is the social work and charities that Hamas carries out that wins the hearts and minds of the people. In Gaza, one in three workers is without a job, and one in two families is impoverished. Hamas operates in stark contrast to the inefficiency and corruption of the Palestinian Authority (Yasser Arafat's organization) (Hamas, 2001).

So, you can learn a thing or two from terrorists. Many people would see terrorists as evil. Certainly, you cannot condone innocent people being hurt or killed, but charity is a powerful force. We appreciate those that help us; those that are concerned for us and not for their image. We develop a sense of trust when we feel that someone is looking out for us.

CHARITABLE LEADERSHIP

Colin Powell tells of a story that affected him. He had a glittering army career, but when he talks about that career he often dwells on the less glamorous moments—the screw ups.

Powell recalls that as a young platoon leader in Germany, he was horrified to realize that he'd somehow lost his service revolver. Now, losing your revolver in the Army is a really big deal, but his captain didn't ream him out. When his revolver was recovered (he had dropped it in his tent) his captain, Tom Miller, returned it to him with a reprimand and some stern words of caution, but that was it. Powell says this is the kind of leadership we need. He says you've got to trust people—they will make mistakes, but you shouldn't ground them off about it. Powell believes, "When they fall down, pick 'em up, dust them off, pat 'em on the back, and move on" (Duffy, 2005). Powell admits that Captain Miller impressed him, but he says he is the product of not just one person's influence but of hundreds.

Hamas and Powell have perhaps only one thing in common. Both recognize it is how you treat people, the love of your people, which makes a difference. We are not countries, corporations, or organizations. These are made up of people, and focusing on them and not yourself, a slogan, or PR moments creates a real sense that someone really does care for you. It is this **genuine generosity** and concern and love for your fellow man that fosters people's sense of **trust and loyalty**.

It cannot be simply talk. The Bush Administration Millennium Challenge Account is a very good way to think about financial assistance to African Countries, because it provides help to governments that have demonstrated the capacity to use the aid. However, giving money to Robert Mugabe will not help Zimbabwe's economy. The problem with the Bush approach is not the idea, but the execution. Having proposed the idea, it has not been followed through with by allocating the cash it promised. The Millennium Challenge Account was meant to have a \$5 billion (that's five thousand million) annual budget. To date, the administration has only dispersed a pitiful \$110 million (Zakaria, 2005).

A CULTURE OF CARING

Leadership today requires courage, communication, and caring. Robert Foley, President and Chief Executive Officer of Parsippany, which is a New Jersey-based unit of Cendant Corporation, says its Travelodge Hotels must distinguish its economy hotels from its competitors. He says they "need to **establish a culture of caring** and give people the feeling that they can express themselves comfortably in an out-of-box kind of way" (Buss, 2001).

We see acts of generosity and caring within our personal lives, so why not at work? Vicki Crane relates the story of her dad, who passed away at 5:55 p.m. on October 14, 2002 in Blue Springs, Missouri. She felt numb with grief, but the sense of duty her father had instilled in her took over. She and her sister assembled a memorial table and brochure commemorating their Dad's life. She said his life was one of building. He built and expanded his home several times, added new rooms, a garage, driveway, trees. But he was also a builder of his daughters' joyful and successful lives because he believed in them and assured them that in any case, they would always have his unconditional love. He was the biggest fan of his grandchildren's educational, scouting, and sports endeavors. He served in the military, participated in Camp Fire Girls, Job's Daughters, school, and church. He reached out to those less fortunate, primarily disabled veterans and children (like those with no fathers.) One of the daughters had a cousin and a grandson both named after her father.

At the funeral, even more stories about how their father had built others' lives surfaced. In the Bible, Matthew 25:35-36, it says, "When I was hungry you gave me something to eat, and when I was thirsty, you gave me something to drink. When I was a stranger, you welcomed me and, when I was naked, you gave me clothes. When I was sick, you took care of me and, when I was in jail, you visited me." That passage seems appropriate here.

His daughter says kindness, patience, mercy, humility, generosity, and happiness were the hallmarks of his life. She felt the greatest gift her dad gave her was the demonstration of how to love the unlovely—a veteran with a drinking problem, a neighbor who was severely disabled, a child with a rebellious nature. It is easier to love people at a distance by writing a check than to visit them and spend time helping them build their lives in productive ways. She said she often saw her father turn an enemy into a friend and an adversity into an opportunity (Crane, 2004).

This is a story to which many of us may relate. We can all think of someone like this. For me, it is my uncle James, whose gentle nature affected so many lives. A life well-spent is one full of sharing, caring, and compassion rather than prominence and position. So why can't this approach work on the job? People obviously need it; we seek family, church, and other organizations that give us the chance to express this caring.

LOVE AND MONEY

So what does all of this have to do with hard-nosed, bottom-line business thinking? Perhaps more than you realize. Remember, organizations, suppliers, and customers are real people, not statistical groupings. Financial well-being may in turn rest with something as soft and fuzzy as caring. Staff recruitment and retention certainly are affected by the climate within an organization. Customer satisfaction and trust are impacted by this as well. Genuine caring, not the PR type, is how you build your reputation. It is how you become admired and respected. When you have their hearts, you have them body and mind.

Jayne Felgen, a nurse, tells of how she was profoundly affected by how one hospital was handling her crises. She said she was in the middle of a two-day work visit with a client in North Carolina when she took a call from her husband in Pennsylvania to let her know that her mother had been hospitalized in Ohio. He explained her mother's condition, then after a brief pause he also told her about test results that affirmed a reoccurrence of her father's bladder cancer.

From her hotel room, Jayne called the hospital's switchboard operator at 7:15 pm. The operator in turn connected her to the unit clerk on the telemetry unit. Jayne introduced herself and explained that she was the eldest of her mother's children. She told the unit clerk that, despite her typical ability to hold together in a crisis, she felt she was losing it. She asked if she could speak to her Mom's nurse.

The unit clerk said their nurse worked 12 hour shifts and that her nurse could not be interrupted. She asked if she could write the nurse a note and slip it under the door, so the nurse could make that decision. Chuckling, she said that was not an option, but she could call back in 15 minutes on the toll-free line.

THE MOMENT OF TRUTH

Jayne spent the next 15 minutes pacing and sobbing. Then she gained her composure and was “loaded for bear” when she called back. The unit clerk greeted her and thanked her for calling back so promptly because her mother’s nurse, Mary Johnson, was waiting for her call.

Mary introduced herself as an RN and her Mom’s nurse. She said she understood that Jayne was the eldest child and asked about Jayne’s critical care experience so that she would know at what level to begin their conversation. Then Mary began to thoroughly review their clinical findings, test results, treatments, and their effectiveness. She then asked Jayne what more might she need to know to give her mother the best possible care. Jayne informed Mary that her mother had learned the day before that her father’s bladder cancer test results were positive again. Mary asked, “Do you think that may be playing a part in your mother’s stress?” “Absolutely,” was Jayne’s reply.

Mary asked Jayne what was the one thing she could do for Jayne’s mom that she would most appreciate. Jayne said a back rub would please her because she was thin and had arthritis, particularly in her spine and hips. Then Mary asked, “Jayne, what can I do for you?”

Jayne gasped, but then recovered from her surprise and she answered that Mary had already done it. Mary then expressed empathy, stating that she could only imagine what it must be like to be in her shoes. She then told Jayne that there are no certainties, but she thought her Mom was out of the woods clinically. Mary also asked Jayne to leave her telephone number so she could call if Jayne’s mother’s condition changed. She advised Jayne that if she couldn’t sleep to call anytime between then and 7:30 am because she would not consider it an interruption. Mary then transferred her call to Jayne’s Mom’s room, and Jayne spoke to her youngest brother. Her brother began to relate what happened, but Jayne became immediately distracted by all the background noise and inquired as to what was happening. Her brother said, “It’s Mom’s nurse... she’s giving Mom a back rub” (Felgen, 2003).

Mary Johnson is exceptional. She had accurately assessed that Jayne was in need of care. Her questions were purposeful and showed compassion in uncovering what mattered to Jayne.

ANTICIPATION

Dynamic Dialogue is a learning approach that integrates principles and techniques from story-telling, dialogue, and action learning. In Jayne’s story there was fact-finding used to construct a unique customer encounter. Everyone was part of the team, with the RN welcoming the family into the process so that a respectful relationship was established. Provocative and thoughtful questions were used to convey good intention and caring. Critical thinking was involved because Mary anticipated Jayne’s concerns and took care of them—including the back rub. There was openness and sharing of information.

For Jayne, the experience changed from early frustration, anxiety, and fear to relief, gratitude, and comfort, later developing further into admiration and respect for Mary. This case demonstrated how everyday caring and compassion can make a difference. You can still show charity and caring in spite of the organization. Commitment to making a difference is not about corporations and logos; it is about people relating to people.

Mary Johnson went the extra mile and created calm and a sense of hope for Jayne. She focused upon the needs of others, in this case, the family and not herself, even though she was probably pretty tired. It is obvious that she was really there emotionally. Jayne wasn’t just a statistic; she deserved dignity, respect, and comfort. Mary was a problem-solver, not a problem-maker. She explained, informed, generated options, validated and supported. It is not really that hard to do.

As a charitable leader, you just have to put yourself in others’ shoes. Individuals do make a difference, and so can organizations. Powell and Mary show us it is possible and it does make a difference. Being charitable is not only the right thing to do, it is the only reasonable thing to do. In the long run, it is simply the best way to lead and manage. You create trust and respect when you focus on their needs.

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