



Paying it Forward, or Begging?

MY FEET WERE ANCHORED IN PLACE, AS I gazed up in awe at the stuffed reindeer decoration clinging to the wall. It had a soft brown face with a large red puffball nose, two floppy ears, a set of stuffed fabric antlers, and a red velvet bow finishing the whole look. I stared into the two eyes made from black felt, and felt a connection.

Wrapped around one of the antlers was thin string, attached to a tag upon which was written "\$15." Fifteen dollars? It might as well have been a million dollars as far as I was concerned. As a seven year old, whose personal discretionary income topped out at about two dollars a month, the reindeer was more than I could afford.

I was standing in the church parish hall, where the annual craft and rummage sale was in full swing. All around me, fellow parishioners were enjoying the coffee and snacks of coffee hour, but not even the lure of apple juice and graham crackers – a staple at the kid's table – could pull me away from that reindeer.

Eventually, my mom told me it was time to go. I slowly pulled my attention away from Rodney (I'd named him by that point) and looked up at her with pleading eyes. I could *not* leave this reindeer behind. Suddenly he had become my soul mate. How could life go on without him? My dad walked over to join the intense situation. I hatched a plan in my mind. My parents could buy him for me! You know, just pick up the tab and call it good. Like a gift ... that I didn't deserve. I figured that I wanted it, so I should be able to have it.

"Please," I whispered through clenched teeth, trying to hold at bay the tears that were prickling the backs of my eyes upon the thought of leaving this reindeer that had so captured my heart. Some serious negotiations pursued.

"How much is it, again?" my dad asked.

"Fifteen," my mom responded, looking down at the tag. I looked from one parent to the other, eyes pleading. The craft sale was ending the next day, and I was risking someone else getting the reindeer.

They discussed amongst themselves, and a resolution was reached. They would buy it upfront, so that it wouldn't be purchased by someone else; however, I would have to earn a portion of the money to pay them back, before I could earn and take possession of the reindeer.

So, there was going to be no free ride for me! I learned a lesson of fiscal responsibility that day; if I wanted something, I had to earn it, save for it, and could only have it *after* I could afford it, because there is a difference between needs and wants.

It stuck with me – both the lesson, and the reindeer. (The reindeer hangs on my office wall, today, rescued, after I found him in a give away pile he had been relegated to a few years ago. He's become something of a behind-the-scenes-mascot for the magazine's production department.) In our society, this is a lesson that needs to be repeated and continually taught. I need to remind myself of it on a regular basis, and I am guessing, based on recent trends, that others could use the reminder, as well. The increasing number of pitches I have seen lately for crowd funding of personal events, wants and desires – not *needs* – has left me wondering when it became acceptable to expect so many things to be simply given to us, at the expense of others, without working for it, saving for it, waiting for it, or earning it.

"Invitations" to contribute to the funding for a variety items and events have appeared in my inbox lately, including the following pitches: the purchase of a high-end digital camera for someone's blog; covering a family's veterinarian bill for their dog; rent, utilities and furniture expenses for a young couple who wanted to move across the country but hadn't saved money to pay for it; an individual who had the opportunity to travel across the country for work, thought "it would be better if the whole family could go and make it a much-needed family vacation" and was welcoming contributions.

This isn't crowd funding, and this isn't paying it forward, this is begging. What used to be, "I see it, I want it, I work for it" has become, "I see it, I want it now, I expect you to give it to me." Asking someone else for money to buy something that you want, and for which you are not willing to work is wrong. What about earning it with sweat equity, time and discipline? Do we live in a world where it is easier to log onto a social media site from a smartphone, while sitting on a couch, and cast a plea, expecting someone will bite, than it is to work for something?

Before feathers get too ruffled, let me state I believe stepping up to help those in need is one of our greatest responsibilities to our fellow man. Benevolent funds set up to cover expenses due to medical tragedies, helping someone get back on their feet after a house fire, job loss or other tragedy is a very worthy investment of our time, money and spirits; paying for someone's wedding because they want a big 'ol party, is not.

There is a time and a place for giving, and so many in our community give with generous hearts to make the lives of others better. This is the kind of giving that should be celebrated, which is why we are shining a spotlight on a sampling of the area's best charitable giving opportunities, in this issue.

Read about them and pay it forward—we're begging you!

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