

Giving Back

In this time of economic crisis, acts of charity and generosity are a powerful way to reduce stress and lift your spirits. As I discussed in prior articles, being kind to others is a way to improve your attitude about life. No one has been spared by the financial hardship our nation faces. My focus in these articles has been to counter all of the bad news with practical ways to handle all of the stress and anxiety. Charity is one way to accomplish this. Even though our resources may be limited, there are ways of little cost that allow you to give back to family, friends, churches and your community. Research has shown that a random act of kindness can go a long way to changing negative feelings into self confidence and gratitude.

People are surprised to learn that economic hardships have many side effects that are quite positive. One positive consequence is families and communities come together to help one another. The psychological benefit of neighborly support is because the focus of our attention moves away from our individual self and shifts to helping others. This has a profoundly positive impact on our attitudes and emotions. A great movie I saw once that reveals the power of giving is called, *Pay it Forward*. In the film, a young boy learns the lesson of having a generous heart. What the hero of the movie discovers is that his acts of kindness and generosity become contagious to others. The moral of the story is generosity begets generosity.

In my own life, I have experience with this phenomena. Many years ago, my wife's friend, Cindy, lost her home to a disaster. Cindy is a single mother of two small children and she lost everything. When my wife told me what had happened, I immediately wrote a sizable check to help Cindy get her family safe and secure. I told Cindy this was not a loan. When she insisted I be repaid, I explained to her that all she needed to do to pay me back was to do something kind for someone else, to pay it forward. Several years later, Cindy called me to tell me a friend of hers had gotten into a car accident and her car was ruined. Since her friend lived in San Diego, she needed a car, but had no money to replace it. Cindy had an old truck that she rarely drove, but was reliable. Cindy gave her friend the truck no questions asked. However, Cindy told her friend the only condition necessary for getting the truck was that she agreed to pay it forward to someone else. Kindness begets kindness.

Charity and generosity need not be expensive, nor need be to the degree explained above. Some no cost ways to pay it forward include carrying groceries for someone elderly, donating canned food, and volunteering. Maybe there are things in your garage or in storage that could be donated to hospice. How about the easiest, least expensive of all, smile. Phyllis Diller once said, "A smile is a curve that sets everything straight."

America is a country founded on values. My prediction is the worse the financial crisis becomes, the more people will refocus on those founding virtues. The way to better times is to embrace positive attitudes and values such as charity, kindness and generosity. Taking the step in your own life to give back to others will improve your outlook and reduce negative feelings.

One American value I regard highly in my own life is integrity. Our spoken word needs to match with our actions. With that said, I would share with you what I do for my podiatry practice and the community. I am a volunteer for Sutter Lakeside Wellness Center and I volunteer as a soccer and baseball coach. In my podiatry practice we have several philanthropy programs. All uninsured patients receive a discount from regular fees. I offer a patient appreciation program which gives all new patients a Safeway gift card in acknowledgment for their trust.

In addition, when a statement from a patient is paid in full, I donate a percentage to the Lake County food bank called, Clearlake Gleaners. I rest better at night and feel good giving back to my patients and community. Lastly, realize there is no small act of generosity. Anything you can do to pay it forward will inspire another person to do the same. Maybe Lake County will become a community of contagious compassion. It will start with you, today.

Matthew McQuaid, DPM is a board certified foot surgeon practicing in Lakeport. He is an award winning author who has a particular interest in Mind/Body medicine and its positive impact on health. Dr. McQuaid teaches classes at Sutter Lakeside Center for Health. For more information or for an appointment please call 707-263-3727.