

## We The People Program 7



### Paying it Forward

Something quite lovely happened to me recently. Yes, something unexpected that galvanised ideas and thoughts together in a very moving way. It was ever so simple really and occurred while Anna and I watched a movie together on a wet and windy Saturday. First however I would like to dedicate this narrative to the principle involved and then finally tell you the name of this must watch movie so you can make a difference too.

The technical term is 'generalised reciprocity' and it does not do any justice to the notion and tends not to give a clue as to what the issue is about. It's a benign phrase and yet it describes something of great worth. It's about real kindness with an interwoven twist.

Over 2 thousand years ago a Greek play called *Dyskolos* touched on it but fell by the wayside and was not found again until 1957. However the concept was rediscovered by Benjamin Franklin in 1784. It's about paying back a debt in a most unusual and uplifting way and Ralph Waldo Emerson mentioned it in his essay on 'Compensation' in 1841. The novel, *Magnificent Obsession* written in 1929 also recounts the notion that good deeds should be performed in confidence.

As I researched the matter I was humbled by the amount of references to this subject and the amount of people who have been moved to follow through in a simple but profound way to pay back kindness. Now let me explain what this is about. A debt occurs when someone owes something to someone else. These days this is often money but a debt can take on many forms and in particular some people feel a debt is present when someone performs an act of charity or good will. The most powerful is when a random act of kindness occurs which of itself usually requires no need for pay back or an inherited debt. Nonetheless the recipient may well feel a debt exists and assures the person giving that they will return the favour or if you will, pay it back. It's odd because it seems at times society has grown to acknowledge a debt even when there isn't one. You can hear the response "...I will pay you back for your kindness". How can that be, as kindness by its very nature is a gift requiring no repayment? However this is all about "Paying it forward" which is a term I had not heard of before.

It means that when a debt is incurred instead of 'paying it back' you 'pay it forward' to someone else with the request they do the same. So this rolling act of kindness is self perpetuating until someone decides not to. In 2000 Catherine Hyde's novel "Pay it forward" was published and adapted by Warner Brothers for a film of the same name. In the movie an act of kindness bore with it the request that the person receiving the altruistic gift do the same for 3 others. This way there was a multiplication factor and it spread as a movement to thousands of people and all because of one boy and his social studies teacher. When the boy chooses his 3 people for his good will quest they are difficult tasks and yet he is not daunted. This is the film that moved us and I strongly recommend you obtain the DVD and watch it as soon as possible. "Pay it forward" will brighten your life and you may well shed a tear while this 'Good Samaritan' finds true meaning in life. I now have three acts of kindness to perform..... and I will.

Until next time this is Kent Bayley