

Philanthropic Giving

By John A. Warnick

Yōu Bǎn Fǎ – (There Is A Way): Reviewing the Wisdom of Great Thinkers to Combat the Negativity and Planning Paralysis that Challenges Philanthropic Planners and Their Clients Today

In 1982 a University of Paris research team performed what may be ranked as one of the most important scientific experiments of the 20th century. Scientists continue to argue over its astounding implications. Some believe that this experiment turned upside down Einstein's long-held theory that nothing can travel faster than the speed of light.

Alain Aspect and his team discovered that under certain circumstances subatomic particles such as electrons are able to instantaneously communicate with each other regardless of the distance separating them. It does not matter whether they are 10 feet or 10 billion miles apart. This experiment demonstrated that: *Somehow each particle always seems to know what the other is doing.*

The findings of this research create new meaning around the interconnectedness of the world we live in. As Marianne Williamson says, "(w)e embrace the idea -- advanced by both ancient philosophers and modern physicists -- that the world is one. Everything connects to everything; therefore, as we change, the world cannot but change with us."

As you contemplate the startling reality that subatomic particles can instantly communicate with each other from one end of the universe to another, please ask yourself these questions—one modern and the other ancient: *What is my role and responsibility in the world? Am I My Brother's Keeper?*

One of the blights of the rush of modern society is the cancer of self-centeredness. Too many ask, "What's in it for me?" rather than "What can I do for my brother or sister?" As many seek to redefine family, we may be ignoring the fact that we are all one family.

Whether you embrace Darwin's theory of evolution, intelligent design, or creationism, the truth is that all of these varying explanations take you to

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back to a common bond between mankind. Those dimensions may be genetic, spiritual or simply the interconnectedness of subatomic matter. The key is that we can not—should not—view ourselves as a detached island.

“Just as the wave cannot exist for itself, but is ever a part of the heaving surface of the ocean, so must I never live my life for itself, but always in the experience which is going on around me.”—
Albert Schweitzer

The Positivism to Help Clients Achieve Their Charitable Goals

As I meet with planned giving professionals, leaders of community foundations and charitable board members, they constantly report of negativism and planning paralysis, which continues to grip the U.S. One philanthropic leader refuses to let that negativity pollute the thoughts, words or actions of his team. He has inspired them with this statement: “It would be a shame to let a great recession go to waste.”

Since I first heard his words, I began studying a number of texts and speeches which offer antidotes for darkness and negativity. In this article I have tried to synthesize the best of that wisdom in the hope it will inspire you, as it has me, to continue to battle through the roadblocks which thwart our own efforts, as well as those of our clients, to be agents of change ¹

The Power of Positive Attitude and Thought

Sir John Templeton, in his book *Worldwide Laws of Life*, challenges us to “be part of the solution rather than part of the problem.” To become part of the solution we have to make sure that our attitudes, thoughts and words are positive. As Wayne Dyer has said:

“When you squeeze an orange all you can get out is orange juice because that is what’s inside. The very same principle is true about you. When someone squeezes you—puts pressure on you—what comes out is what’s inside. And if you don’t like what’s inside, you can change it by changing your thoughts.”

William James, the great 19th Century American psychologist battled depression and physical ad-

versities for many years. Despite those challenges he emerged as the first great American psychologist and noted that “the greatest discovery of my generation is that human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitudes of mind.”

Napoleon Hill, who interviewed 500 men and women who were among the most famous and financially successful individuals at the start of the 20th century to analyze and then formulate *The Laws of Success* ² captures the power of positive thinking in these words, which I have paraphrased:

Whatever the mind of man can conceive and believe, it can achieve. Thoughts are things! And powerful things at that, when mixed with definiteness of purpose, and burning desire, can... change you and the world around you.

Stephen Covey reminds us:

“Most people say their main fault when it comes to goal achievement is a lack of discipline. More often, however, the basic problem is that their priorities are not deeply planted in their hearts and minds. They are working on the “leaves”—the attitudes and behaviors of discipline—without examining the “roots”—the basic paradigms from which their natural attitudes and behaviors flow.”

A positive attitude is our passport to a better tomorrow.

Change Your Vision; Change Your Life

In Lynne Twist’s *The Soul of Money*, we are reminded that simply changing our mindset frees us to see the world—and our role in it—in new and exciting ways. One of the dirty lenses which obscure our vision of the opportunities around us is what Lynne Twist describes as the myths that “there isn’t enough” and that “there’s nothing we can do about it.”

The Talmud teaches that “we do not see things as they are” but as we are. Kahil Gibran taught: “the appearance of things changes according to the emotions and thus we see magic and beauty in them, while the magic and beauty are really in ourselves.”

Too often we let past experiences become blinders which obscure our vision of the wondrous possibili-

ties before us. To change the world we must start by changing ourselves. And perhaps the first step on that journey is to realize that our past is only a story that exists in our minds. When we reflect on what limiting assumptions and fears from our past are blocking our progress, we liberate ourselves to see the world around us in an entirely new light.

In a Jewish legend that dates to the time of the prophet Isaiah, God promises the world will continue so long as there are always at least thirty-six people (the “Lamed-Vovniks”) on the planet who are capable of responding to the suffering that is part of the human condition.

“Do you know who these people are, Grandpa?” a young girl once asked.

“No,” he told her “only God knows who the Lamed-Vovniks are. Even the Lamed-Vovniks themselves do not know for sure the role they have in the continuation of the world, and no one else knows it either. They respond to suffering, not in order to save the world but simply because the suffering of others touches them and matters to them.”

The little girl from whom I heard this legend was Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen, an early pioneer of holistic medicine. Her grandfather inspired her to discover “that Lamed-Vovniks could be tailors or college professors, millionaires or paupers, powerful leaders or powerless victims...What mattered was only their capacity to feel the collective suffering of the human race and to respond to the suffering around them.”

I have been deeply touched by the legend of the Lamed Novniks. Some days I intentionally set out to discover, if that were possible, whether any one of us—you or I—might be one of them. What a wonderful lens through which to observe the quiet acts of good people who rise above adversity and negativity to heal another’s soul, to offer hope, or to demonstrate a divine capacity for goodness in difficult circumstances. Perhaps you are—or were intended to be—one of the Lamed Vovniks.

Belief in Your Inherent Goodness and Potential for Making a Difference

Closely aligned with Positive Attitude and Vision is the importance of Believing in Yourself and being aware of your potential to make a positive impact. Nelson Mandela in his inaugural address quoted in part from Marianne Williamson’s beautiful statement about our

ability to make a difference in the world. Here is a fuller version of the Williamson quote which speaks powerfully to the spark of goodness that resides in each of us:

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn’t serve the world. There’s nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won’t feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We are born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It’s not just in some of us, it’s in everyone.”

Faith, Hope, and Compassionate Action

Faith is the key that turns vision into action. It is, as the Apostle Paul taught, the evidence of things not seen. As Albert Schweitzer, the 1952 Nobel Peace Prize winner said, “It is not always granted to the sower to live to see the harvest. All work that is worth anything is done in faith.”

Closely intertwined with faith is her twin virtue hope. As I have reflected on faith and hope, I have become convinced that fear is darkness and faith and hope represent light. Just as light chases darkness away, so faith and hope can overcome fear and negativity.

Last year I was privileged to attend a workshop taught by Dr. Kristen Armstrong entitled *The Art and Science of Breakthrough Decisions*. Dr. Armstrong points out that that our fears lead to:

1. Paralysis
2. Impediment to logical thinking
3. Suspicion
4. Flight or fight
5. Taking control
6. Lack of communication
7. Self-defeating behaviors

Dr. Armstrong then noted what a difference we can make when we use hope and faith to displace fear. They foster:

1. Sharing
2. High level of creative energy
3. High level of cooperation

4. Increased problem-solving ability
5. Constructive rather than destructive communication
6. Reduced territorialism and saving face
7. Commitment

The world needs more faith and hope. When we choose to embrace positive attitudes and thinking, reject the darkness of fear and self-limiting assumptions, and put on the lens of hope and compassion, then we begin to brighten the world with the invisible light of positivity and faith. The commitment to live by faith and hope doesn't just make our own life more satisfying:

“As we let our light shine, we consciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence actually liberates others.”—Marianne Williamson

A recently returned Mormon missionary who had served in Taiwan shared some powerful examples of how faith and a “can do” attitude had changed not only his life but of many individuals his service touched. He shared with me a powerful Chinese motto—*Yǒu Bǎn Fǎ*. Whenever he and his companions faced what appeared to be insurmountable obstacles, they would cheer themselves with that Chinese phrase, which literally translates as There

Is A Way.

Nathaniel Hawthorne reminds us:

Let's consciously choose to live each day as if we were a Lamed Novnik. Let's adopt the *Yǒu Bǎn Fǎ* mindset and a hope-filled determination to make a positive difference in the world and empower our clients to do the same. The sure result of that effort will be more compassion and charity. It will bring us closer to the beautiful vision Pierre Teilhard de Chardin describes in these words:

“The day will come when, after harnessing [space], the winds, the tides, gravitation, we shall harness for God the energies of love. And, on that day, for the second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire.”

ENDNOTES

- ¹ In the December/January 2009 issue of the Journal of Practical Estate Planning I offered three steps we could take in this battle against the negativity and fear that surrounds us. First, we need to be aware of the problems and consciously be looking for opportunities to help. Second, to be “connectors,” we need to help connect our clients with nonprofits which are aligned with what they are most passionate about. Third, we need to be the emotional fuel which will help sustain our client's giving during difficult times by modeling compassionate service and giving.
- ² Hill's *Think and Grow Rich* is his most famous book. It is the best selling distillation of the principles he introduced in an earlier book entitled *The Laws of Success*.