

Opportunity and Awareness

My grandfather told me many years ago when I was just a young boy that “Luck” is no more than when Opportunity meets Preparation. I am sure the quote came from someone famous... a President or an inventor or someone like that, but I heard it from my grandfather – therefore, it was all his! ☺

I always remembered that quote as I grew up through the years. I always wanted to be prepared for whatever opportunity that came my way and for the most part, I always was. Many aspects of my life reflect a certain amount of luck, especially my success in my early adult years. I have always believed that with the wisdom my grandfather gave me, I had always made sure I was prepared for such opportunity.

It is sad to say that so many do not have a wise grandfather to share words like this with. In fact, many who do have a grandfather in their life, these days – teach their grandchildren “survival”, because that is what they know.

Some would define luck as a divine gift as well. Some of us get those figures in our lives that share productive wisdom simply because we were born into it. Regardless of how you define that... it is not something we sought or earned, it is something that we simply got, for free. I would be a shame to waste such a precious gift. It is my belief that when you are gifted something so important, that it is your responsibility to share it with those that did not get that gift directly.

I was thinking yesterday about these gifts while in a meeting discussing how we can help juveniles with mental illness that come into the court (legal) system. I was thinking about all of the gifts that I have been blessed with. I not only grew up with two loving parents, I grew up with grandparents, great-grandparents, aunts and uncles and even great-aunts and great uncles. None of these privileges were something I earned – just something I was gifted. I have a responsibility to that and the responsibility is not to simply walk in gratitude, it is to share what I have learned to those that have not had these gifts. How could a young man or woman know what I know when they didn't have all these people around them throughout their lives that cared? How can my expectations for them, be the same as my expectations for myself? They can't.

This line of thought brought me to another thought process. I utilized my grandfather's quote for my professional life. What I did not do, was utilize it for my emotional and personal life. The people that I have been introduced to and the projects that have touched my heart and the mentally ill that I have worked with throughout the years have been a gift on an entirely different level. My belief system and philosophy tells me that these opportunities have always been a part of my life – but instead of using the word “prepared” – I will substitute it for “aware”.

Throughout my professional life, I was keenly aware of who to know. I knew who to be seen with at Happy Hour and who to be seen with at dinner. I knew who to have lunch with and I knew what events to make sure I was on the guest list. It amazes me how much effort I was willing to place in this process. It amazes me that I surrounded myself with so many likeminded people. It provided me with the financial ability to

“give” and I did. However, I don’t think my checks could ever give what I truly had to give.

Many doors have been opened after the closing of so many in the recent years. It is amazing how many doors have opened, actually. The doors have not been open for my ego or me, but for the experiences I have lived and how those experiences may help others. It is amazing to me of how much I have been unaware of throughout my life.

I ponder how many opportunities have passed by me because I was unaware. The fast pace of life, especially here in the United States can and does consume many of us. Our priorities, while not “wrong” seem so distorted. We are so busy “getting” and “requiring” and “deserving” and with that mindset we work even harder so that we can keep up with these self-imposed expectations.

Now, I am not criticizing anyone’s way of life. I do believe that when we work hard, we deserve to live our lives as we choose without guilt – I do believe in that. For myself, however – I realized that when life slowed down a bit – I looked around and realized, “wow, that doesn’t even take money – to help that guy out”. It only takes what was given to me – it only takes the gifts that were simply just given to me. Compassion is the only conduit to the ability to help another person out.

We all have said it, me included. “Well, if this and this and this happened and if I knew this person or that person, I could do that.” Or “Sure, they can do that – they have this or that”. I am not sure I believe these words. In fact, I would go as far to say they are just excuses. When one simply opens their eyes a little wider – one sees opportunity all around us. I firmly believe that God is constant on his effort to place everything that we need around us. This includes placing people in others’ lives that ARE aware for people who are NOT AWARE.

I think we would all be surprised, when we open our eyes a bit, how many causes there are for our fellow human beings that don’t require our money but simply our awareness – our attention and our compassion. I also think you will be surprised what natural instincts will come upon you to help your fellow man or woman, when you are aware.

It is amazing to me how many people that I have met throughout the years in hospitals, on the streets and in prison that I have actually said, “why wouldn’t they think the way they do... they know nothing else!” Yet they are branded and labeled and held to the same expectations as I am? That is not even logical. They have not had the God given gifts that I have. If I chose to ignore that and write it off as “it is what it is” and not share what was simply “given” to me and not earned – I am not sure that I could live with myself. I took it upon myself to realize that it was and is my responsibility to share with them what I was so graciously given. I cannot, nor will I place the same expectations that I have for myself on someone that was raised by one parent (maybe) in poverty, with no education and in a dangerous environment that survival was and is the name of the game every day. Most of us that live in the middle class could not make it through one day of the lives of some of the people that I have met. I stand by those words. I don’t care how resourceful, educated and smart you are – survival is a whole different game.

As I read through news articles and watch the various news channels, I see the depiction of so many being held to the standard of Middle America. I don't have solutions to share because I think that each and every one of us has a solution that is conducive to our own lives, if only we are aware.