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Leading from the Heart

So you know you're lucky when you get to show up for a job that's a career and share the experience with the kind of people you'd adopt if you could.

Team Leader Dani never applied for the job; her honesty, fairness, eloquence, and good heart pretty much rendered the selection process unnecessary.

Dani first stepped through our doors some thirteen years ago. On that occasion I was too busy being busy to appreciate the opportunity; all I managed was a wave and a glance. My co-workers urged a return visit (and the threat of an organized strike) and I've never spent quality interview time more wisely.

Dani was a very quick study and instantly won the respect of co-workers and patients alike. Within a few weeks, on her own initiative, Dani executed an inventory of supplies. Within a few years she was leading a community project that served Temple City schools (and managing most of the local dentists in the process.) A little while later, Dani was named National Dental Assistant of the Year by the prestigious Crown Council.

Although Dani has deservedly won honors as a Dental Assistant, they don't come close to defining her as a person. Dani happens to share December birthdays with my Dad. And I know for sure there are at least two amazingly generous, empathetic good hearts in the Golden Rule Hall of Fame...both of whom started out on December 2nd.

When I was accepted onto the Board of Directors of Pasadena's Haven House (the first shelter for

victims of domestic violence founded in the U. S.), Dani showed up with a carload of clothes the next day. Every year, we'd adopt a Haven House family for Christmas; and having selected and wrapped all of the gifts with her sister Denise (now our Scheduling Coordinator,) Dani always took the lead as we met yet another fractured, courageous, and grateful family, gamely trying their best to put a smile on one of life's cruelest betrayals.

Last November, our office organized a food drive, benefitting low income families with children attending local schools. Don't have to tell you who created, organized, and led the event...that generated over 1,000 pounds of Holiday donations.

A few Mondays ago, Dani was really animated in sharing what she'd done over the weekend. And I don't know about you, but sometimes my Team Leader makes me feel like the most selfish loser in the world. While I was out playing golf and agonizing over a college football rally, Dani and four lady friends and family decided Sunday was a great day to make a difference...again.

Armed with peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, juice, water, and cheese and crackers, Dani and company visited some mostly invisible sites around Olvera Street, Elysian Park, and LA County General Hospital and fed 120 homeless Angelenos. As Dani told me Sunday's story, I could see what fulfillment looked like; when she finished her report we both mouthed the words "...but for the grace of God." And then a big smile and... "Dr. V, we're gonna do it every month."

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too. There are some common thoughts that prevent me from engaging: "I can't do this alone. This is not my mess. I don't have time to start and finish today. I don't know where to begin. I am not ready to let go." All of these thoughts are running through my mind. They are debilitating.

The act of cluttering is really an instinctive reflex that draws our attention away from the heart of an issue. When our living space is clean and uncluttered we have no choice but to examine our inner state. This is why we avoid it. We don't want to know what is really going on in the living space we call our brain. The stuff we keep around us keeps us focused on the unimportant.

Cleaning up is merely an event or a tool, not the final destination. The true goal is to identify and establish the lifestyle you want most once your house has been put in order.

Now, I see the connection between an organized living space and the life I hope to enjoy in 2016. I want a simpler life. I want to spend my time living instead of taking care of stuff I no longer need.

Our pending move is calling us to action. As I sit and examine each saved item, I am also examining my own existence. I realize that simplicity is a voluntary action that cannot be thrust upon me by someone else.

Simplicity is a discipline that results in greater levels of personal freedom. Masses of things that are not needed complicate life. They must be sorted and stored, dusted and resorted and stored again. These required actions lead to a busy life and the busyness of life often prevents us from being available for the things that really matter.

Simplicity is about choosing the authentic life that we are meant to live. It means shedding obligation and pretension. It means spending our time, energy and money, in ways that sustain us, instead of drain us. It means being intentional about what we do, who we are and how we live.

As we move forward into this new year I invite you to pause and consider the things, (both personal behaviors and belongings) that must be left on the side of the road in the name of quality.

As you do so, you might want to ask, "What can I let go of that will simplify my life?"

Doing this means that you are choosing to let go, instead of having things taken away from you when you are too old or too tired to hold onto them any longer. These acts of voluntary release will keep you focused on growing whole instead of growing old. Now that, is resolution worth pursuing. ☺