

Perspectives



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Giving

Ellen Worgan

We make a living by what we get, we make a life
by what we give.

Sir Winston Churchill.

The Federal budget for 2008–2009 allotted about \$22 billion to defence. If one person were to have this much money, they would replace Alexei Mordashov as the 20th richest person in the world. \$4.65 billion was given to international security and development. If one person were to have this much money, they wouldn't even make it into the top 100. Why is this gap so great? Is it because we don't care? Or is there another reason?

Our world has formulae for just about everything. Our lives are structured around routine and habit. For anything to be truly effective, it has to either become part of our routine or to shock us out of it. One part of our society that relies on these shock tactics is advertising, and in particular, advertising for charities. However, anything can become a habit, a formula. Picture this.

Close up. Dark eyes, cautious, sad but steady. Zoom out. A child standing in the dust. Cut to views of dirty water, makeshift houses, crippled toddlers and a family struggling to survive. Then, a change. Children start to smile. Water flows from a newly built pump, schools are established and families have enough to eat. The last image is a phone number. The voiceover, which has recounted the story of Kham, a child living in poverty in Laos, concludes with, 'Your donation can make a difference. Call now to change lives'.

We see campaigns like this every day. We know that there are terrible things in the world. Disease, poverty, hunger, war ... every day we are assaulted with images of horrific situations and people in pain in an attempt to shock us into action. We are aware of these things, and yet it doesn't seem as if we are really trying to change them. On the news we see cities burning from suicide bombings in Lebanon, families dying of diseases we have vaccinations for in Mali and a man imprisoned for speaking out against censorship in China. We see famine in war-torn Sudan and children dying of AIDS in the Philippines. And yet the government that our democratic society chose gives \$22 billion to defence and less than a quarter of this to the other members of our global community.

So why, when we see these images every day, do they refuse to shock us? The answer is stunningly, horrifyingly simple. They don't. We *are* shocked — the first time, at least. We stare at the screen between the toothpaste commercial and the sports report and we can't believe that things can happen that way. But then we hear about Sonny Bill Williams' contract with France and we forget, or push these confronting, awkward thoughts away so we don't have to deal with them. At most, we call the number and donate part of our weekly income. This donation doesn't necessarily inconvenience us. It may mean that we have to keep those shoes on lay-by for another week, or that we have to buy home-brand tissues this month.

Put simply, we have become desensitised. We have looked at what to some people is Hell on Earth and we have ignored it. Worse, we have accepted it. Martin Luther King Jr. said that, 'In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends'. If we do not speak out, do nothing to further the causes of charities fighting for human rights, world peace and universal equality, what will we be remembered for? For silence. For neglect, selfishness, apathy and ignorance. This is definitely not what any generation wishes to be remembered for.

This desensitisation was not chosen. It is human nature, an instinct. We protect ourselves from emotional pain by accepting what we are exposed to on television, in newspapers

or on the radio as normal. If not normal, we justify it as being out of our control or too far away. We think that such suffering will never touch our lives. And the worst part is, this is perfectly logical. But there are other human instincts. To hunt and kill. To guard our property with our lives. To take what we need to survive and ignore the needs of others. We like to think that we have moved beyond these, developed into a sentient, compassionate race.

But if no-one takes responsibility, if no-one gives time, money or thought to the everyday tragedies in our world, if we remain desensitised then they will continue. To keep our world from destroying itself from the inside we must take action. We must pledge ourselves as fighters. We have to be devoted to our cause. And we have to be willing to make sacrifices that make our lives harder. Simply, we have to give.

I opened with a quote from Sir Winston Churchill. This quote embodies the attitudes of a caring generation. ‘We make a life by what we give.’ These eight words are succinct, clear and give the audience no doubt as to what Churchill means. We have responsibility and control. With our hearts and hands we can choose to ‘make a life’ for ourselves. With our hearts and hands we can search ourselves and commit ourselves to a cause. With our hearts and hands we can be shocked again. We can break away from a mundane routine. We can allow ourselves to feel the suffering of our fellow humans. We can give.

Will you?



Ellen Worgan wrote this in 2008 when she was in Year 11 at Pennant Hills High School in New South Wales.