



SEARCHING FOR COMMON GROUND

Even though I am a vegetarian, I love Thanksgiving. For me, it's not about the turkey, it's an opportunity to reflect upon my life and to recognize that for which I am truly thankful. It also presents an opportunity to focus on the communities of which I am a part and to think about ways I can be more giving and engaged.

I live part of the year in a small village in the Pocono Mountains, where the median household income is less than \$45,000. Earlier this month, there was a vote on whether or not to pass a 1% tax to finance improvements to the library system. To give a little color, the county population has increased by 50% over the past decade, the state funding was cut by \$50,000 this year and the county's funding to the library has been frozen for over a decade, despite higher usage and demands upon a strained library system. The proposed tax would have averaged only \$35 per household. 5 times as many votes were cast opposing the library improvements. As a library patron, I couldn't understand why.

One vocal opponent of the tax quipped that he shouldn't have to pay for the tax because he doesn't use the library. Another chimed in that she uses the library in a neighboring county for free, so improving this county's library was of no benefit to her. Their arguments seemed small minded and petty and I could have thought of many names to call them. After all, I pay school taxes although I have no children and our taxes pay to maintain roads in the county on which I will surely never drive. In the aftermath of "The Library Vote" (as it has come to be called) a rift has emerged in this small community, a strident division with tangible tensions mounting. It has made me think about what I could give in this community that would do the greatest good.

The rift that's building in our little town is played out in various forms in other communities, large and small, between nations and even in our own industry. It comes from a misplaced focus on our differences, instead of on our common ground. My neighbors who opposed a library tax have views which are quite different than mine, just like the views of your boss or your employee on compensation might be quite different than yours. Likewise, the conflicts between Main Street and Wall Street or conflicts between nations are based upon perceived differences and the ability to separate ourselves from each other and to demonize the other side as ignorant, irresponsible or worse. Frankly, I don't like it and I'm making it my business to counteract it. I decided that the greatest good I could contribute would be to actively look for our common interests and to build bridges of understanding across the river of differences which have been emerging in the local community, in our industry and with everyone I meet.

My friend, Marc Barasch, has written a terrific book *Field Notes on the Compassionate Life* (www.compassionatelife.com) in which he poses a fabulous question which I have taken to heart – What if the great driving force of our evolution is actually Survival of the Kindest? In reflecting on what I could do to have the greatest impact within my community (and I mean that in the broadest sense of the word – my family, my town, my

business and my role as a citizen of the world), I have made a pledge to find compassion toward those who seem different. That means actively looking for the commonality we share, instead of the differences, and finding a way to understand how and why they see things differently.

For most of my adult life, I have signed my correspondence (and now emails) with the closing “Kindly, Denise”. It was a conscious choice I made more than 25 years ago that it was the attitude I would adopt in addressing my fellow beings. Kindness and gratitude are not the antithesis to successful business, if anything, they are the attitudes that allow for smoother relationships and more respectful interactions. They are the foundations for the bridge across our differences. Here are some ways I’ve found common ground.

We all want to feed our families. Not being able to feed your family can heighten one’s sense of the differences that seem to be between us. Our local food pantry is serving over 1800 families in our small community (over 10% of the households in the county). My contribution helps to lessen a difference and offers kindness where it is needed. By the way, they tell me their pressing needs are for paper goods – toilet paper, tissues, feminine products, shampoo, dog food, kitty litter, etc. in case you want to support your local food pantry this year. Find a local food pantry at www.feedingamerica.org or check with your local church, synagogue or mosque.

Vibrant business communities keeps the local economy flowing. Our business community is small but vibrant and we want to keep it that way. So we purchase as much as we can locally. Nothing beats the convenience of Amazon, but working with local stores to order what we want and paying them the little markup to make sure they stay in business keeps the local economy thriving, means no empty storefronts to depress the commercial real estate market and ensures neighbors who can make a living wage to support themselves. For every \$100 spent locally, \$68 stays in the local economy. Check out www.the350project.net for ideas on how to save the bricks and mortar our nation’s economy is built upon. That’s good for everyone.

Each of you reading this has amazing talents that could be put to great use in building a compassionate, cooperative future. Not sure where to give your time or money? Bill Clinton’s book *Giving – How Each of Us Can Change the World* is an excellent compilation of causes and ways to think about our role as agents of change. You can probably get it at your local library!

The past year has been a challenging one for our clients and our candidates. For us, October and November showed as the strongest months in the past two years. More firms have engaged us for new searches, more clients have made offers, more candidates are reporting successful conclusions to their lengthy searches. Really, there seems much to be thankful for. As I prepare for the Thanksgiving journey to be with family and friends this week, I offer you these thoughts:

I am grateful for clients who have entrusted the growth of their business to me and to my colleagues at Pinnacle Group.

I thank every candidate who has given us the opportunity to speak with you and, in our small way, participate in changing your life for the better.

I appreciate the support and camaraderie of my colleagues at Pinnacle Group, who have made it possible for me to do this work I enjoy.

And, I am filled with gratitude for the bounty of a life overflowing with opportunities to practice kindness and to find the common ground I share with my family, my friends and my community both near and far.

Safe travels for a holiday filled with Giving and Thanks.

Kindly,
Denise

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