

## Colleen's Contemplations – September 2009

I know I've talked about attitude before, and how it colors our expectations and how we react to things. I'm not feeling like I've fully explored that, and since I bring you all along on my journey to greater understanding (aka therapy session) I thought I'd tell you what has me struggling. My husband and I often joke that the secret of our successful marriage is low expectations. It's not that I don't expect him to be brilliant and a moral compass for our family, I do, I just don't expect him to know what's going on in my head without me telling him. If I want flowers and candy for Valentine's Day I'll let him know well in advance. Having a weekly date night to sit and talk is also a requirement for us, but that's part of self-indulgence, not the sin I'm working on now. I think we let our own lives direct our expectations of others.

Where am I going with this? I don't know yet. I've been asked why we don't verify peoples' needs. On the one hand, we don't need to; many of our clients are referred by the social workers at the schools, senior center, and county. But on the other hand, how do you measure need? Is it just by income? What about those in hopefully temporary situations, like a medical problem? Even with good insurance the co-pays can wipe out your savings pretty quickly.

Since we don't help with money, I guess I'm free to expect that the people who come to me for help are not there to take advantage of us. I expect that they don't want to be in the situations they are, and are working hard to get back on their feet. Where is this coming from... well, a few months back (yes, I do chew over things for a long time) someone suggested that I'm enabling people to make bad choices in their lives. That without making sure they are changing their ways, I'm just allowing them to continue to make the same mistakes. To me, the word enable suggests that people want to be the way they are. I know that there are stories of people who take advantage of the system, but I don't know any. There have been times where I wondered if I was being naive. For a while early on I had issue with people who seemed to feel entitled to any help that was offered. But even then, over time, I've come to know the people and I know how much their hearts have changed in the time they've been coming to us. For some, it was a trust issue, get what they can because who knows how long 'til we say no more. For others it was defiance, a need to stand up and make claim to what others have and not to be looked down on. Where are those people now? Most don't need us anymore. If they do come in, it's to donate and give back. They like to come in and let us know how good things are going now. What they really needed was someone to care; someone to expect only goodness.

We don't just hand out diapers; we hand out encouragement and belief that their lives will get better. We believe in the people we help. We believe they don't want to just take from us. We believe that we are merely paying it forward. So maybe when I say I have low expectations, that's not quite true. I expect people to care about each other. I expect people to believe in themselves, and I expect people to give when they can and take when they need to. That's how I verify need. As for the enabling comment, perhaps that person's expectation of others has been colored differently than mine. Perhaps I need to share more good stuff to counteract all the bad stories that are out there, and perhaps I need to pray even harder that we all expect the best from each other.

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