



# SOPHIA ASSOCIATES

*Awakening Leadership Within*

## ***Paying It Forward***

So much is written about leadership yet I still find that there is one concept that is missing in most of the literature. That is the concept of generosity.

In my twenties, I was fortunate enough to have a mentor that challenged me to do things I was afraid to do, thinking that I would fail, or that I wasn't ready to take on projects that seemed to me to require far more expertise and talent than I thought I possessed. Yet, each time he presented me with a challenge, I worked hard and met that challenge and developed the self-confidence and resiliency that I later would need in my career. After working for him for a number of years I was ready to move on and he encouraged me to move to the next phase in my career. I remember saying to him, "I will never be able to thank you enough or pay you back for what you have done for me." His response was "Pay it forward." Up until then I had never heard that phrase. Eventually I came to understand exactly what he meant, but that took some years.

In 2000, there was a movie called Pay It Forward starring Kevin Spacey and some other wonderful actors. The movie was based on a book by the same name and is the story of a young boy who is challenged by his social studies teacher to think of something that could change the world then put it into action. The boy conceives the notion of paying a favor not back, but forward. There were three rules for paying it forward. 1. It has to be something that helps people. 2. It is something that they cannot do for themselves and 3. You do it for one person and that person does it for three other people. The philosophy here stems from a desire to help others in recognition for the help one has received. Goodwill spreads exponentially through society, creating a social movement with the goal of making the world better.

We live in a very competitive world. Generosity, the act of giving without expecting some kind of repayment is not one found often in business. What ROI would there be in that? It is easy to be generous when a company or individual is doing well. True generosity comes from giving focused on the other person or Rule Number Two – to do something for someone that they cannot do for themselves – just because you can. It also comes from the belief that there is "enough", a sense of abundance and creative possibilities that allows one to feel that being generous is as meaningful to the giver as the receiver.

If you believed in the concept of "paying it forward" what affect would that have on your business, on our culture and communities? Who could you

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mentor or teach? What contributions would you be making just because it made a difference for someone? You may find a completely different ROI awaiting you. It can be as simple as showing a child a possibility when they feel something is out of their reach. It could be working pro-bono for a cause you believe in. It could be providing your employees with a work environment that creates learning and growth opportunities. You may lose them as they grow as professionals and people but wouldn't it be something to instill in the next generation of leaders the concept of paying it forward? Couldn't that make your company the place this new generation wants to work?

The Baby Boomer generation is struggling with their mortality. As this generation enters into their Elderhood, many are seeking meaning and a renewed sense of purpose. This generation is not going to retire (at least that is Dennis Hopper's message). This is the time to pay it forward. There is wisdom in this generation born out of the changes they have experienced in areas of technology and global, cultural and social shifts. Let's make sure to "pay it forward" to the next generation of leaders.

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