



Opening a letter



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As usual, one recent morning while at my NGO CSRC in Dhapasi, I went to a small fruit shop to purchase breakfast. I picked up a mango and an apple and when I tried to pay, the owner started saying something which I couldn't understand. I asked an adjacent shop owner for help, but he didn't speak any English. I tracked down a man who could help me and he explained that the fruit shop owner was indicating that last week I had overpaid and that today's breakfast was free. I walked away with a huge smile and a special start to my day with a new feeling of love for Nepal.

The previous day I had gone to Boudhanath with an American friend, who had contracted polio as an infant. Dan was visiting Nepal, with another American athlete, Greg, a contingent from Wheelchair Athletes Worldwide (WAW), making a donation of sports wheelchairs and conducting two clinics and a tournament for 60 Nepali wheelchair athletes, children, men and women of all ages. At Boudhanath, Dan used his titanium crutches to get around as we met many people including a monk using wooden crutches. Dan gave a small donation to the monk who told

him that this would bring good karma.

On previous visits to Boudhanath I had noticed piles of prayer flags waiting to be burned and was wondering who I might request these from. On this day, I asked a security guard if this was possible and he subsequently spoke to a manager. I explained that Dan was from California and wanted to bring some prayer flags to the States. The manager obliged by having the security guard provide some hanging prayer flags. He also gave me a strand which will be brought to my son's ashram in California. The manager then unlocked the main temple for us. Both Dan and I were taken in by these acts of kindness but it somehow felt greater, knowing that the prayer flags which had been hanging at Boudhanath would make their way to California, a small but somehow important connection.

As I wrote in my May column, I was involved during the month with facilitating a wheelchair sports event involving civil society, corporates and the private sector. The three days were a success on many accounts as primarily witnessed by the smiling faces of the wheelchair athletes, their friends and family, spectators and the volunteers.

One of my good friends, Bishnu of Nature Trail Travels & Tours, Trekking & Expeditions provided me with an analogy relating the clinics/tournament to an envelope, and how so many people read the outside but only the

receiver sees the inside. Given that the three day event was developed through a range of partnerships, I found this analogy to be quite compelling.

It is often very true in life that we only see what appears on the surface, and that random acts of kindness, everyday events, go unnoticed. In terms of the wheelchair sports event I can safely say that many persons and businesses behind the scenes did most of the work. Bishnu selflessly provided transportation for Greg and Dan, inviting them for dinner and generally made them feel a part of the Nepali family. DRAGONAIR provided a huge donation of transporting the wheelchairs at no cost from Los Angeles to Kathmandu without any word of wanting/need publicity. The International Collage of Hospitality Management (ICHM), although I had asked them to initially provide 50 meals, ended up providing upwards of 100 meals and had 10 students volunteering at the event working from early morning to late into the afternoon. All of this was done as in-kind donation.

Most of the donations were conducted with little publicity, except for having a logo on a banner or an ad. Naysayers might say that nobody does anything for "nothing" and to some extent this is true. Many times a business doing a good deed is looking for free publicity, which in terms of CSR makes sense. Nevertheless what I generally found was an overall desire to help. I would also venture to say that it is the little guys, those in the background, who really made this particular event a success. The little guys didn't have much to gain as their logos really couldn't be seen and were at the bottom of everything. Also, the general lack of an audience didn't help/serve their business.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is about partnership, but these connections have to come from the heart to have true impact. I would never fault a corporate for entering into a CSR partnership for wanting to advance their business objectives, after all this is what CSR, in my mind, needs to be truly about. The place where CSR however often fails is that it is only about the business objective and not about the real reason as to why CSR is being conducted, e.g. advancing the needs of Persons with Disabilities and creating more inclusion, keeping children, especially girls in school, developing livelihoods opportunities to get people out of poverty. But this is an education process and will take much more time.

I want to end with one more story about the inside of "a letter". When I came into the office today I was speaking with my friend Janita, who although she had wanted to come to the wheelchair sports event texted me and said that she was dealing with a person who had had a heart attack. When I asked Janita what had happened she told me that her carpenter had called her because she was the only person that he knew who might have some money to help. Janita was able to get the money together from a number of people to thankfully save the man's life and if she hadn't been able to do this, the man would have been turned away by the hospital.

I will always try to open the envelope to determine what is inside and to truly find out what is happening; appreciating the privilege that I have been living in Nepal. **B**

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