

Mothers, Daughters, and Government Assistance

Some time ago, I provided computer training for a young woman. The woman was in her twenties and lived with her mother. Neither was employed, and they depended on government assistance to survive.

With great pride, the mother announced that her daughter was the first family member to earn a high school degree. She proudly showed me the G.E.D. diploma, and explained that both women were counting on that diploma to secure her daughter a job.

As I updated her laptop computer, the mother explained their situation to me. Government checks were their only source of income. Each month one check arrived late – generally on the fifth of the month. This was an ongoing problem, since the rent was due on the final day of the month. Consequently, they were two hundred dollars short each month.

The check's lateness caused hard feelings with the owner of the rented house. Although the mother insisted they did pay the full amount of the rent – albeit, five days late – the landlord threatened legal actions against them.

As I talked to the two women, I was struck by their incessant cigarette smoking. They were polite enough to take turns, and did most of their smoking out on the porch.

At one point, when the mother was smoking outside, I explained to the daughter that computer training would make her more marketable for job procurement. It was then that she confided in me that she did not want a job.

As I continued to remove viruses and update the laptop, I noticed a variety of beer bottles and cans lying around the house. Some were gathered in plastic bags or their original cases. They were visible everywhere.

Before our session ended, I mentioned – discretely – that cigarettes were expensive. Yes, they agreed, smoking was an expensive addiction. However, they bought their cigarettes in large quantities from a discount store, which saved them money.

Then, with great enthusiasm, the mother revealed that she played the lottery every single day, hoping to win a million dollars. She hoped that someday they could afford a better place to live.

After the session, I reflected on the two women as I drove home. Their

lives were open books to me, and they revealed much more than I ever inquired or wanted to know about them.

Sometime later, I contacted the mother. She notified me that they were indeed evicted, were homeless for a day or two, lived with a friend for a while, and found another place to stay. However, when I went to their new apartment for training, they had already left there too. Eventually, the mother's cell phone was disconnected, and I never heard from them again.

How can society help these women? The amount of money they spent each month on cigarettes, beer, and lottery tickets was substantial. With just a little discipline, their lives could be more secure, and greatly improved.

Social engineers and politicians develop programs for people like this all the time. However, it is understandable why these programs so often fail. Neither woman wanted to work, nor would they ever agree to end their chain smoking, beer drinking, or lottery purchases. They were not becoming wealthy from the government assistance they received. They were barely making it financially each month, however, neither possessed the incentive nor the determination to alter their situation.

With a roof over their head, plenty of food to eat, cell phones, cable television, a laptop computer, and all the typical amenities in a rented house, they were content to do nothing except wait for their government assistance, complain, and hope for a lottery miracle.

I tried to imagine what would happen to them if they did not receive government assistance. Many would contend that we need more government programs to assist such people. I am not so sure. It just might be the government programs that allow the two women to do nothing with their lives except smoke, drink, watch TV, and pray for their lottery number to be selected. I wonder how many others in our society are doing the very same thing.

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