

Feel free to add to the archives 7/14

Don Ye Not The Lead Cloak

"Don ye not the lead cloak; cast off the garments of anxiety, lest ye become subdued by another's weight, and fall under their trepidation" - Nola 97

"Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces". - Matthew 7:6

Sometimes in prison you have to be careful of being too kind. While it certainly is godly to help others, you need to be careful to not let people take advantage of your good deeds.

Lately, there's a guy in here, let's call him John, who asked for my help doing legal work. I am no attorney, but I do know how to write. So, he asks for my help, and promises to give me stamps for helping him.

Cool, I love mailing my essays, and can never have enough stamps. So, John gives me his legal work - if that's what you call it. Loose papers, notes with no arrangement, sometimes scribbled. Like a roadmap in New York City. No direction. John, after giving me the papers, proceed to tell me what he wants, revisiting all the issues of his case.

So I ask him, "did you write it on the paper?". John says "well, I'm telling you now". 'Yeah right', like I'm going to remember him whining for half an hour. So, I go back to my cell and lay the papers out. It's a mess, and John didn't help me by taking the time to write the important angles he wanted to use. I had to recreate a strong and compelling argument for him, with less than half the info in front of me.

I called it, "shining a turd".

But, I use the information John gave me, using my writing skills as best I can to create a compelling argument, to give him the best chance, based on what he gave me.

Now please understand, I'm no Ralph Waldo Emerson, nor an I Shakespeare. I'm also no Mallock or Perry Mason, but I can write, and in prison, it is a tremendously valued ability. But sometimes people put lofty expectations after minimum effort. Guys in prison expect \$5,000 service for \$2.00 worth in stamps (if they pay at all).

Still, I put my best effort in writing the document. I give it to John, he reads it, and praises my work. He shares it with another guy, and gets approval. I told him, that if I missed anything, then he can add it. He says that it's good, and mails it... →

He gets a response, and he is denied.

So, John comes to me, explaining the details, then starts accusing me of not making the points he wanted. He says that I didn't put all the information he had in the document.

"What do you mean?" I used everything you gave me! I checked every paragraph you gave me, and everything was used!" I said.

"You didn't put the doctor's name up there." he said

"There IS no doctor's name up there!" I responded

He insisted I was wrong, that I left out information he said, to which I took offense. I told him that I can't write documents based on what he says. He has to write it down, because I'd rather not write it than write it and be wrong. Yet, he insists I neglected to use the information he claimed he wrote. So, I challenged John to go get his notes, and show me the doctor's name that he claimed I left out.

Long story short, I was right.

John spent all that time whining about what I did wrong, when he made two fundamental errors: One, he refused to document his own work, putting me at a disadvantage of helping him, and two, John failed to take responsibility for his own final draft. He had the sole responsibility, after I wrote the document, to reuse it as he sees fit. It is, after all, HIS document.

Instead, John tried to make me feel guilty for his errors, and try to convince me to carry his burdens. That kind of ingratitude is dangerous, like when you're trying to help people, because it will wear you down, as you carry the same paranoia they carry, like wearing a cloak made of lead. Those types of people don't value help, because they're too distressed about their problems.

There's no sin in being too kind, but I think you need wisdom, to know how much you can extend yourself before you're wearing someone else's burdens. Trust me, that will bring you down, and the very people you're helping, won't lift a finger to help, or even say "thank you".

So, cast off that weighty cloak, but not your compassion. It is always needed.