



My View

THE GIFT OF SELF

During the holiday season I'm always touched by programs which collect toys or food and distribute them to those in need. As a matter of fact, I know that many TIP Affiliates participate in such efforts. Although TIP is not one of those organizations whose primary mission is to distribute gifts during the holidays, we are indeed Gift Givers. Granted we are not gift givers in the traditional sense of bringing wrapped presents to others. But when TIP volunteers respond to TIP Calls they bring a very important gift to emotionally traumatized citizens...the Gift of Self.

This **Gift of Self** is a subtle and mysterious gift. But it's very real and very powerful, and it's exactly the gift which those who have been struck by tragedy need.

What is this **Gift of Self**? It's difficult to describe. It's not something we can purchase at the Mall, and it's not something we can see. But we know from experience this gift is very real, and we know it's the only gift that really matters to someone in the midst of horrible tragedy. Let me try to identify the elements of the **Gift of Self** which TIP Volunteers give to our clients...

> The **Gift of Self** involves the willingness of TIP Volunteers to put themselves "on the line." When giving the Gift of Self, TIP Volunteers know that they will likely to be affected by the situation they are responding to. They know that they may come away having "picked up" the client's pain, or they may come away with a gnawing feeling of helplessness (*"I didn't do anything."*). So, the Gift of Self involves an element of personal risk.

> The **Gift of Self** involves TIP Volunteers using their own personalities, talents and knowledge in the service of others. Rarely is a TIP Call "by the book." TIP Volunteers need to fall back on their own life experiences and on who they've become as unique individuals over their lifetimes.

>The **Gift of Self** is not a Gift of Ego (*"here I am in all my helping glory"*). Rather it's a process of TIP Volunteers making themselves completely available to others. As we say in TIP, TIP volunteers must leave themselves "in the car". I'm sure that TIP Volunteers would agree with me when I say that putting their own wants, needs and opinions aside on TIP Calls is the biggest challenge to providing others with the Gift of Self.

In short, the **Gift of Self** can best be described as the gift of "presence." While TIP Volunteers don't arrive at people's doors with presents, they bring something even more important...their loving presence.

As I said at the beginning, I'm all for traditional gift giving during the holidays, and I applaud organizations which gear up for the holidays to distribute gifts to children and those in need (who can't be touched by the efforts of Toys For Tots, for example). But I think it's important for all of us in TIP to appreciate the invisible but extremely important gift that we deliver to others during the holidays and every day of the year...the Gift of Ourselves.

Happy Holiday, and I thank each of you for taking time out of your busy lives at this time of year to make good on that outrageous commitment that TIP makes to the community: "We're always ready...always there."

Wayne Fortin, Founder
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