

PUTTING YOUR PRIVILEGE TO WORK

A trip abroad led Cecil to a revelation about never taking an easy life for granted. 💎

"When I was a student, my dad and I went on a field trip with his teacher buddies - a China-Hong Kong cultural exchange.



We didn't just go to the tourist areas - we went everywhere. I was on my moral high horse, pointing out some fairly questionable places with questionable behaviour. And then, my dad said to me, "Can you speak so casually of ethics if you were in that position? Being raised in that environment and trying to survive, would you do any better?"

That sobering comment really struck a chord with me and led to serious introspection. As much as I would like to say the opposite, if I had been in the position of the people I saw, living their lives, I'd probably do worse. Being born to middle class parents living in a developed country, I'd already won the birth lottery. All things considered, I've had an easy life.

Many times, people are simply put into bad situations. A son being born into a broken family, a daughter relocating as a refugee and ending up in a bad neighbourhood. It's the roll of the dice. These are real lives, real people. They're not numbers. We have to try to break that sense of anonymity and understand our shared pain and experience. I feel that society is often very good at making you not respect yourself. It's nice to talk about people rising above their situations or circumstances, but statistically, it's a crapshoot. It makes a great story, but how many people actually make it?

You can't do it alone - I realized that very quickly. But I think United Way is a great step forward. It brings a human element to so many of the big issues we're tackling in this city and allows us to see the faces behind the struggles.

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We need organizations like United Way to persist in the face of complex, enduring challenges like poverty. We can't solve everything in one generation, but we have to start somewhere. Multiple generations of effort - my own included - are needed for sustaining power to affect any kind of meaningful change.

In order to build strong communities, we need financial capital and human capital. I believe that in today's world, charity is about more than writing a cheque, and I'm a big proponent of "venture philanthropy." That's why I donate my time to supporting United Way-funded social enterprises: businesses focused on profit and purpose. With social enterprises, we wrap charity in dignity. They provide much-needed financial stability, and perhaps more importantly, they build a positive internal narrative of self-respect, dignity and empowerment."

-Cecil



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Saskatoon & Area

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