

## **“Half Measures Avail Us Nothing!**

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Found in the basic text of Alcoholics Anonymous is the following quote, “Half measures avail us nothing” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 1936). It refers to the single purpose and full measure of commitment toward abstinence necessary to sustain a sober lifestyle. What would happen if we applied the same measure to end homelessness?

Recently, I attended a meeting to review the list of local city/government/business issues. The issue of homelessness was the only one referred in the negative. City officials and business people at the meeting spoke about the area having the best racetrack, the best hotel-motel accommodations, the best colleges and universities, the best tourist attractions, the best beaches and so on. I suggested why not have the best homeless services? Please, allow your belief to be suspended for just a minute. Imagine the local Chamber picking up a potential business client at the airport. Following the initial formalities the Chamber representative takes them on a tour of the respective city. They point out the fine colleges and universities, the renowned race track, the fabulous medical facilities, the famous beach and the local homeless shelters. Yes, that’s right, the local homeless shelters. The car stops and they exit in front of homeless shelter. The potential business clients are surely tired after visiting all the facilities. But, they seem energized as they exit the car. Outside of the facility a sign with the name of a local business, in bold colors, stands at attention. It proudly reads “...over 5,000 homeless served yearly.” It lists its accomplishments: the 1,338 medical visits performed yearly at a savings to the community of 1.3 million dollars, thanks to Halifax Hospital; 27,000 showers afforded to those who otherwise would not be able to attend to basic hygiene; 3,000 loads of laundry and 6,000 articles of clothing provided; 750 mental health visits provided by Halifax Behavioral. The group is interrupted by a mother with her two young children as they walk by, one in a stroller, the other loosely holding her mother’s hand. They nod their head and exchange a friendly “hello”. It is pointed out that she and her two children are living in the shelter, having been rescued from the confines of their car. They are on their way to the cafeteria where 250 meals are served a day. “120,000 meals a year”, the potential business client says. “That’s impressive!” The local Chamber representative is pleased with what they find. The potential business client returns to their car. It is not long before they visit another homeless shelter. This one is helping families by giving them a hand up not a handout. A few success stories are shared. The tour ends with a remarkable story of one client and her family; She is now a law enforcement officer for a local community.

There is a system phenomenon that occurs in many families. This phenomenon occurs when a family member has become ill. Many times it is our aging parents. One of the siblings steps up and tends to the needs of the family member. If the illness is chronic, resentments build up. The one sibling feels they are doing more than their siblings. Again

let me borrow another quote from the literature of Alcoholics Anonymous, “Resentment is the rotgut of sobriety”. Resentment is also the rotgut of action. This phenomenon is not limited to families. Community systems experience this rot-gut as well.

What is wrong with one community doing more than others? What is wrong with setting the pace? What is wrong with being the best? What is wrong with being known as providing the best homeless services in the County? What is wrong with being the brightest star? Let’s shift our mind-set. Imagine saying to the potential business client, “We are going to show you something our community is most proud. We are going to show you how our community takes care of those in greatest need. We think communities ought to be measured by how they take care those most in need. We are proud of our community. You can be a part of our community!”

After all, half measures avail us nothing.

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