



# OPINION: SHIFTING POLICY FROM ENTITLEMENTS TO EMPOWERMENTS - INSIDE SOURCES

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Give a man a fish, you raise his dependence; teach a man to fish, you raise his independence. Government entitlements have incentivized dependence, and to quote the late Charlie Munger, “show me the incentive, and I’ll show you the outcome.”

Robert Lupton’s book “Toxic Charity” (2011) details how receivers of entitlements can experience increased levels of dependence. Lupton’s work suggests that policies addressing poverty, despite being well-intentioned, are generally ineffective. He finds that many efforts designed to help get people out of poverty further perpetuate poverty. It’s essential to evaluate well-intentioned policies based on long-term outcomes achieved by receivers rather than short-term rewards givers feel through their provision.

James Whitford, the executive director of Watered Gardens and the True Charity Initiative, explained in a 2021 interview that entitlements raise dependency for the receiver and paternalism for the giver. The giver is just as much at fault for this dynamic as the receiver, perhaps even more so because the giver is giving what they already possess while the receiver is receiving what they do not possess. Whitford builds on Lupton’s “Five Steps to Dependency” to add “Five Steps to Paternalism,” summarized in a 2022 LinkedIn article titled “Five Steps to Paternalism: How We Can Unintentionally Create Codependent Relationships With People We Serve.”

In step one, Grace gives \$5 to Rob for the first time; Rob appreciates it, Grace feels a sense of exhilaration because she helped Rob. Receiver feels appreciation, giver feels exhilaration.

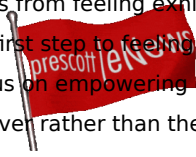
In step two, Grace gives Rob \$5 a second time; Rob now anticipates it, Grace now feels a sense of purpose. Receiver feels anticipation, giver feels purpose.

In step three, Grace gives Rob \$5 a third time; Rob now expects it, and Grace now feels necessary to Rob’s well-being. Receiver feels expectation, giver feels necessary.

In step four, Grace gives \$5 to Rob a fourth time; Rob now feels entitled to it, and Grace now feels essential to Rob’s life. Receiver feels entitlement, giver feels essential.

Finally, in step five, Grace gives \$5 to Rob a fifth time; Rob is now dependent on it, and Grace now feels paternal, vital to Rob’s existence. Receiver feels dependency, giver feels paternalism.

Thus, the cost of “free” is quite expensive. The giver goes from feeling exhilaration at the first step to feeling paternalistic by the fifth step. The receiver goes from feeling appreciation at the first step to feeling dependency by the fifth step. Lupton recommends that we don’t do for others what they can do for themselves, focus on empowering others to be autonomous through self-sustaining lessons and resources, prioritize the long-term interest(s) of the receiver rather than the giver, and, of course, do no harm.



It’s vital to understand that one of the significant consequences of repetitive entitlements is an unintentional sentence to perpetual, perhaps even inter-generational, dependency by the receiver and paternalism by the giver.

What does this mean for present-day philanthropists and humanitarians? Many provide entitlements to feel good about themselves and may not realize the dynamic they may be perpetuating.

It’s much easier to sustain systems of handouts than to sustain systems of empowerment and autonomy. By definition, systems of empowerment and autonomy would be designed to eventually become unnecessary and obsolete, achieving its goals. Many receive entitlements because they have no other choice. Shouldn’t receivers be satisfied receiving anything at all during times of need?

The responsibility falls on both the giver and the receiver to establish a system designed to become obsolete one day: a system that empowers the receiver to no longer need the giver. A comprehensive means test administered quarterly and a sustainability plan established to prioritize the receiver’s long-term interest(s) after expiration could be valuable steps in addressing these perpetual, inter-generational issues. However, this will take additional work from all parties involved, making the process of giving and receiving more arduous than it may need to be.

Givers and receivers of entitlements are presently incentivized to maintain the paternalism-dependency status quo, and thus, it will likely remain the outcome for the time being. However, looking forward, we have to ask ourselves why there seems to be perpetual and inter-generational dependency built into our sociopolitical system. Are we feeding into it through entitlements?

If we want people to be self-sustaining, autonomous and independent, we’ll have to develop a system of empowerment instead of entitlement. Teaching how to fish rather than giving out fish.