

INSIGHTS THAT MY CLIENTS HAVE TAUGHT ME

WHAT DO YOU WANT YOUR GOVERNMENT TO DO FOR YOU?

M. K. Doc Downing Ph.D., LMFT

I know what I want from my government; I want a government that will empower me to be all that I can be. I am tired of governments that take power away from their citizens by making them co-dependent.

Now that it is election time, many citizens and politicians see elections as the time to get the people to “choose up sides.” Before you choose which side you are on, may I suggest that you might want to consider just what it is that you want your government to do for you?

Governments are necessary, but not all governments are good for their citizens. Often, people think that only governments that are dictatorships, authoritarian or repressive are bad. There are many ways for democratic governments to repress their citizens. The goal of all repressive governments is to make you dependent. When you think of dependence, you often think of drugs and alcohol, but people can also become dependent on government welfare, subsidies and entitlements. Dependent citizens don't think or rebel; they are the kind of voters that most political parties want. Dependent citizens are often angry at the hand that feeds them and want to know “What have you done for me lately?” But since they are dependent, they won't cause much trouble and can easily be pacified.

All oppressive governments have several goals. One is to get as many of their citizens dependent on them as possible. Next, is to keep their citizens dependent. “The people will keep us in power because they need us. How can they rebel when they are dependent upon us?”

Under a government that does everything for you, you will become dependent and the more the government does for you, the more dependent you will become. The message that you receive is that you are not capable of taking care of yourself. The government responds with, “we feel your pain and we will take care of you” (because you are not capable of taking care of yourself). These governments provide for your

basic needs with programs that will need to be increased every year. In this way, you become more dependent upon them.

A second way these governments' use to keep you dependent is random consequences, both negative and positive. You never know if you will be thrown in jail or just get a slap on the wrist. Mandatory sentences are frowned on. There is no cause and effect; there are no consequences that are applied consistently. As a result, "It is never my fault; it is when you, the government (cops, IRS, narcs, etc.) have had it up to here that I get in trouble." (Don't you feel sorry for me?) "I am now the victim and you're the authoritarian bully that makes my life miserable."

The third thing that these governments do is to convince you that you are not capable of making a difference; therefore, they have to do everything for you. The result is that you believe that you can not make a difference in your own life much less in the lives of your loved ones or your children. With this belief, it does take a village to raise my child.

These governments ***pretend*** to encourage you to make a difference. But, the real message is, you don't make a difference because you don't have the power to create what you want. You are made powerless by a horde of regulations, controls and taxes. All you have is what the government deems proper to give you. When you believe you don't make a difference, then you will not vote or rebel, you will just demand more and more from the government. And the government will respond with more help because they are afraid of losing power. "I don't have to think or educate myself; the government will take care me." "It is my right to have the government pay for my pregnancies, my birthing, and the care of my children, whether I'm a citizen or not."

The fourth thing that these governments will do to make you dependent upon them is to make sure you never learn to deal with delayed gratification. "I want what I want when I want it and you had better give it to me."

"I deserve a subprime loan because I deserve to own a home. It doesn't matter that I have not saved enough for a down payment." And when the whole thing goes south, then I can blame the government for not protecting and rescuing me. (Don't you feel sorry for me?)

As a dependent person, you may want a government that will enable you, protect and rescue you from your mistakes (so you don't have to learn). You may want government to think for you and tell you what is best for you (even though you complain about it).

But for me, I want a government who will empower me so that I know I am capable; one who is willing to let me learn cause and effect. I want a government that believes in empowering me to know that I do make a difference and will teach me the value of delayed gratification.

Hemingway said, "Everything is your fault. . . if you are lucky." I personally want everything to be my fault so I can change it. The ultimate power is in not blaming others.

Instead, the debate seems often to center on you want your government to do! This is a very different question. The responses to this question often center on these kinds of answers:

- Defend and protect the country (national security)
- Regulate interstate commerce
- Regulate our treasury
- Provide a standing army
- Regulate interstate highways
- Insure public safety
- Collect taxes

These answers can certainly give you an idea of what you believe that the United States government does for its citizens but it does not answer the question of what you want your government to do for you.

I believe it is time to start asking NOT what I can do for my country but what do I want my country to do for me! A better way of saying this is, what do you want the Purposes of the United States to be?

I started asking this question of men and women years ago, in terms of what is the purpose of a man/woman? The answers I was given were predictive of how they parented their children, and how they treated each other. The answers also had a major impact on how their children turned out and how successful their marriages were.

Parents who saw their role as only taking care of their mate and their children became rescuers, enablers, and co-dependent and their children grew up to be convinced that they were not capable and that there was no cause and effect because someone was always there to rescue them and get them out of their messes.

People who do not see themselves as capable will become dependent people, dependent on drugs, alcohol, gangs, welfare, or on their mates. They usually find it very hard to leave abusive relationships. They see the world as not being safe and that they are not able to protect themselves.

People who do not learn that there is cause and effect because they were protected from the consequences of their behaviors blame others. And, because it was someone else's fault, then they do not have to change.

These are the people who do not see themselves as making a difference in their own lives or in the lives of others, so they don't even try. You will hear them saying it doesn't matter what I do, it will not make any difference. These are the people who will not vote because their vote won't make a difference.

The final thing that these people will probably learn is that they can not deal with delayed gratification. They have problems with credit card debt because credit cards are too easy to get. They have problems buying a new home because they are never able to save enough for a good down payment.

So, I starting asking myself this question, what do I want my government to do for me?

I personally do not want someone or some government to rescue or protect me from my mistakes. I learn most from trial and error not trial and success. Years ago, I decided that I wanted parents who are empowerers not enablers. Now, I have decided that I want a government who will empower me and empower the ones I care about.

Now, I ask this question of voters, what do you want you government to do for you?

For you, what are the purposes of government? Not, what party do you want to be a member of. Instead, what kind of a government do you want? Not what laws but what types of laws do you want your legislators to pass? Each time a law is put forth we should be asking what is the purpose of this law, not what does this law do for me and the ones I care about?

For each of you, you are answering these questions whether you know it or not, whether you vote or don't vote.

Do you want a government who takes care of you or do you want a government who empowers you to care for yourself?

M. K. Doc Downing Ph.D., LMFT is a therapist and author of books and articles on relationships and parenting. He may be reached at DocDowning@att.net to be put on the email list.

M. K. Doc Downing Ph.D., LMFT
<http://www.DocDowning.info>