



As Published in the Charlotte Observer,
Editorial ‘Viewpoint’ December 23, 2008

By Mike Whitehead

Intentionality for All Seasons

This is my final column as a guest columnist for the Charlotte Observer. I have enjoyed and appreciated the opportunity to write from various perspectives on building a community that works for all of us.

Most of what I have shared in this space in the past year has been about how people like you and I can make a difference in our community. Most of the examples and ideas I have shared come from relationships I have with people who do this every day.

I speak with people on a regular basis who wake up with the notion that they want to make a difference with their lives. The difference that we make doesn't have to be noble, or grand or lofty. In fact - for many of these people, living a life of purpose is so much a part of them that they wouldn't even use those words. They just get up and do simple things that make life easier and better for others whenever they can.

These simple things can be as easy as a phone call to the person in the cubicle next to us that just lost a job, a handwritten note to the guy whose father just passed away, or offering to take care of a neighbor's child so she can go Christmas shopping. It can mean delivering meals to people who can't leave their homes, taking a few extra moments to have a conversation with someone without family, or acknowledging the police officer directing traffic.

These are things that we're all equipped to do – regardless of economic chaos, holiday frenzy, or endless to-do lists.

Believe it or not, a simple perspective shift makes all the difference. That ‘other guy’ who cuts us off in traffic – he's just *another* person like me with bills to pay and stuff going on. That ‘other lady’ in the checkout line with several children howling for dinner - she's *another* person who could use a hand carrying the groceries. That ‘other kid’ in your daughter's class failing math – he is *another* child who needs a little extra help.

Now is a great opportunity to make this shift. What if we used the holidays to test drive our intention to make a difference? We could choose to experience our family gatherings as

business-as-usual...with grandma cooking and Uncle Jim talking about the business and cousin Ricky playing video games. After all, each year has its delights, and predictability. Or, maybe this year you and I could choose to make a different choice. What would happen if we:

- Apologized to one of our family members for something hurtful
- Offered our appreciation to someone for their support and love
- Forgave somebody for harsh words from a long time ago
- Really listened to somebody who drives us crazy and tried to understand where they are coming from

Some people tell me that making the world a better place just can't be that simple. But I have seen too much evidence that one individual contributing value to another cascades into something much greater than an isolated act. This is the building of community.

Charlotte is fortunate to be a city with amazing organizations that attract, and empower and utilize people of purpose. We have many incredible leaders and organizations which seek to create a more inclusive and equitable community. Many of them are quietly and methodically creating meaningful, deep change.

But most importantly, Charlotte is a city with a population that is increasingly willing to seize opportunity and make deliberate choices about its future. What this means is that each of us can choose a habit of intentional behavior toward a greater purpose. We can change our view of the people we encounter from 'others' to 'one another,' and make decisions that invest in the fabric of the community's future.

There are days when this is inconvenient and hard, and doesn't seem to do a bit of good. When it seems like it would just be easier to skip the good guy stuff and turn back on the television. And there are days when we'd like to give the guy at the red light or across the room a piece of our mind.

But we keep going, because if we have done it even for a little while, we have seen that it matters. As I sign off, I hope that you will continue to join me in looking for individual and collective opportunities to make Charlotte an intentional community. If you and I look for the simple ways to make a difference in our daily lives, together we will create a future that works for everybody. Stay in touch, and let me know how it goes.

Mike Whitehead is principal of Whitehead Associates Inc, a leadership and culture development consulting firm. Contact him at mike@whiteheadassociates.com.