

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

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MONTEREY PENINSULA MAKEOVERS – Part 1



WHAT WILL MAYORS DO FOR HOMELESS WOMEN WHO SLEEP IN THEIR CARS?

By Wanda Sue Parrott

CHANGING how to deal with local homeless populations is a major problem all mayors of the seven Monterey Peninsula cities now face, since many pre-pandemic ways are obsolete.

If I were a mayor, I'd start by memorizing these shortcuts to successfully attaining results which I gleaned from my mentor, John D. Rockefeller, more than 40 years ago.

Shortcuts to Success

1. Identify exactly what you need, then concentrate on fulfilling that goal.
2. Stick with one objective at a time; don't mix major goals, lest you get distracted and fail.
3. Use every means at your disposal to set a goal into motion and keep it active.

Even more effective than an esoteric adviser is a living role model who successfully gains solutions that benefit as many people as possible in the shortest time.

Such a man lives here on the Monterey Peninsula. He and a team of around 100 volunteers are helping homeless women get cars.

Todd Sondgroth, Role Model

Todd Sondgroth of Carmel--husband, father of four children, and founder of the Change a Heart Foundation--only began giving cars to unsheltered women three weeks ago. Amazing!

I've witnessed Todd become a role model as both fundraiser and activist during the approximate 6-year history we share as independent friends of the homeless on the Monterey Peninsula. His energy is unbounded and his fundraising talents are remarkable, especially his powers of persuasion that inspire people to donate time, energy, money and apparently automobiles!

He reminds me of a combination Norman Vincent Peale, author of "The Power of Positive Thinking" and youthful Donald J. Trump who went after the impossible and got it. Here's Todd!

In His Own Words

On Dec. 11, 2020, Todd Sondgroth launched his e-mail campaign to provide five cars to five homeless women by Christmas—or, in exactly two weeks.

Soon, e-mails followed that announced delivery of a first, then a second, car and asked for exact-amount donations to cover things like brake jobs, batteries, registration fees, insurance and gas. Here are excerpts from his e-mail announcing that the third car had just been delivered.

"Just sharing a quick story. . . I got chills multiple times while listening to this woman's story. . . It's wild how quickly things can change. . . from a corporate level job, owning a home, etc., to an abusive marriage and sleeping on the street in no time at all. . .

"As we talked about the reality that in an instance, at any moment, our lives can completely change, I couldn't help but pause for a minute and thank God. . . I thanked God for my life. . . my journey. . .

"From the day I was born up until this very second, I've been granted an incomprehensible amount of grace... I've been loved well my entire life... I've had countless people pour in to me. I've always had a strong support system and my parents gave me a fortified foundation to build on...

"Very, very, very few people have that... it wasn't really until I stepped out of my little bubble that I realized just how rare it is. If I hadn't spent a ton of time working in the homeless community. . . sitting for hours at a time and listening to stories. . . sleeping outside on the street multiple times to try to get a glimpse of what it feels like, I may view 'the homeless' through a different lens. . . "

On Dec. 21, 2020, an e-mail from Todd announced that the fourth of five cars had just been delivered. "If we continue to reach out to our community, fundraise, and take swift action, we'll meet and exceed our goal.

"That's where my focus is. . . getting the fifth car delivered even though we're behind budget by about \$365. I'm committed to doing everything I can to get the cars fully repaired and paperwork finalized in the next three days..."

Then the e-mails stopped as Christmas came and went.

On December 29, 2020, at 4:00 p. m. I found this message in my inbox:

"About an hour ago, I delivered our fifth car to a new friend. . . I hit a couple snags and wasn't able to get all five delivered before Christmas. . . however, we're moving our goal up to 10 cars by the end of January."

It was followed by praiseful thanks to all contributors, with love from Todd, and ended with a red instant-donation button, a contact link for the Change a Heart Foundation, and instructions on how to send checks by mail.

I visited www.changeaheart.org and scrolled through the website, shocked when my own name popped up as a Facebook fundraiser for Change a Heart Foundation.

It reminded me of the fourth Shortcut to Success that I'd nearly forgotten:

Ask for help, but only if and when *YOU* need it.

As to where the women will park in their cars? That'll come next week!

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CREDIT: The Change a Heart Foundation, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization based in Carmel, kicked off an ambitious campaign via e-mail on Dec. 11 in which it announced its goal of providing a car apiece to five homeless women before Christmas. On Dec. 21, 2020, this photo with identities obscured by masks, and the announcement that four of the five cars had been given, came via e-mail, and then all holiday communication with the CHF, stopped, leaving two questions unanswered: Where are the women going to sleep in their cars? Did the fifth homeless woman get a car? Read this column to find out! Photo by Change a Heart Foundation.

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“Homeless in Paradise” is a free public service self-funded and produced by independent journalist Wanda Sue Parrott. It appears in Facebook, Nextdoor, and *The Cedar Street Times* at www.cedarstreettimes.com and on private email lists. If interested in being added to the list, submit your request to 831-899-5887, amykitchenerfdn@hotmail.com. Copyright 2021 by Wanda Sue Parrott.