



Stanford eCorner

Defining Charity and Justice

Michael Tubbs, *City of Stockton*

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Michael Tubbs, a fellow and lecturer at the Stanford d.school, contrasts two approaches to addressing societal woes. He describes charity as an important but temporary fix that involves a simple donation of resources, whereas justice means committing one's talents, time and entire self to finding a systemic solution. "That's the only way we as a society will progress," Tubbs says.



Transcript

I think the difference between charity and justice for me is that charity is like-- it's like Band-Aids, right? It's Band-Aids. It's pain killers. And justice is a surgery. For example, last month, two of my wisdom teeth decided to have a conversation on the freeway. And one was literally on a nerve and jumping up and down. And the other one was laughing. And I was in so much intense pain. And my dentist gave me some painkillers and some mouthwash. And they work perfectly. So I don't feel the pain anymore. But in two weeks I have to have surgery because eventually, the pain is going to come back.

And I could keep taking the pain killers and keep doing the mouthwash and feel good in the moment, but next year, 20 years from now, the wisdom teeth still have to be taken out because I've done nothing to address the root cause, which is that I have too many teeth in my big mouth. And I think that's the same way in terms of thinking about charity and justice. That charity is what we do. And it feels good. And it's important. But justice is the hard work of surgery, of what it takes to move the country forward. And then I also think that-- in terms of our own work-- that charity is me throwing resources at an issue, and making the assumption that the problem is one of their resources. If they had more of this, if they had more of that, if I give to them what I have, then that solves their problem. But justice is really about putting myself, my brain, my resources, my talent, my time, and my body, on the line, and a way, until we really get at a solution. And that's not sexy. That's not easy.

That's incredibly difficult. But that's the only way we as a society will progress, in my humble opinion.