



## “Hey Bud, That’s My Money You’re Giving Away”

I was introduced to someone who, I was told, was responsible for many good deeds. “What does he do?” I asked, expecting that the answer would have something to do with volunteer work or private philanthropy.

Nope. Turned out he was a big-time executive with a Fortune 500 company. His job was presiding over all of the charitable contributions the company makes. Since that amounts to more than \$10 million a year, he gets his name and face in the local paper a lot.



“Isn’t that just wonderful?” one of the ladies in the group gushed.

“Well, no, it isn’t,” I replied. “In fact, I think it’s a completely inappropriate use of shareholder money.” There was an audible gasp from one of two people and the whole crowd seemed to back away a couple of feet.

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“How can you possibly say that?” someone challenged me. “I think it’s absolutely wonderful that some of the greedy businessmen in this country give something back to those who are less fortunate.”

Before I got a lecture on how business can only succeed by ripping off the poor downtrodden workers, I said, as calmly as I could, “But it’s not his money to give away. He is simply an employee of the company. The real owners — the ones whose money he is so generously doling out to others — are the shareholders. They are the ones who should decide how their money is used. After all, they’re the ones who risked some of their savings by buying shares in the company.”

I was on a roll now, so I continued: “Any profits the company makes should go to its real owners, the shareholders. They should be the ones to decide what to do with any excess money, not some company executive.”

By this time, I actually had a few heads nodding in agreement. One gentleman even told me, “Why, I’d never thought of it that way before. But what you say makes a lot of sense, young man.” There was no comment from the corporate big-wig who had sparked my remarks; he had stormed off in a huff several minutes earlier.

The attitude that businesses should be praised for giving away their shareholders’ money is nothing new. I remember half a century earlier when my father was named the head of the United Way in the small Southern Indiana town where we lived. Since he was the president of the largest employer in the county, I guess the job was one of the perks he got—like being elected to the board of the local country club.

Anyway, I remember there was a lot of pressure among all the businesses in town to make sure their employees were “100 percent participants” in that year’s fund drive. Woe unto you if every other



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employee had made a contribution to the United Way and you were the only hold-out.

As it happens, for a few days I was. I worked part-time, on weekends and after school as a stock boy in the town's only department store. And I didn't want to give any of my meager earnings to the United Way—or anyone else, for that matter.

Rather than admit I was just a selfish, greedy teenager, I decided to take a stand against the whole issue of group giving.

"Why should some anonymous group of self-appointed leaders decide where these contributions go?" I argued. "Why can't people decide on their own whom to support?"

The answer, I was told, was that this way — the United Way — was much more efficient. Every cause or organization that wanted funds had to submit an application in writing. Various experts reviewed each appeal. Only the most worthy would receive any funds, I was assured.

"But who decides what's worthy and what's not"? I persisted. (Yes, I know. There are few people on earth who can be more annoying than a bright and persistent teenager. God made sure I learned that lesson by blessing me with five of my own.) I finally shut up when my father made it clear to me that (a) since he was the head of United Way in our county I should not embarrass him by publicly questioning the organization and (b) if I knew what was good for me, I'd shut up and donate some of my earnings to it.

Although the role of teenage martyr held some appeal, I decided that this time around discretion was the better part of valor. I put a smile on my face (after all, as our pastor had just reminded us, the Lord loves a cheerful giver) and handed over part of that week's paycheck.

But you know what? To this day, I still don't like the idea of some large, anonymous group deciding how much money to take from me or how it will be spent. Not even if they call themselves the United States Congress or have the Internal Revenue Service to back up their edicts.

Charity at gunpoint isn't charity at all. It's theft. I don't care whether it's the U.S. government taking our tax dollars or some Fortune 500 company taking profits from its shareholders. When it's done without the owners' permission, it's wrong.

That said, I have to add that I'm very proud that we Americans are the most generous people who have ever lived. We give more of our time and our money to help the less fortunate than any other nation or people on earth.

But let me point out that if our government didn't take so much from us, we could be a lot more generous... and surely would be. And I for one would be a lot more cheerful about it, too.

Until next time, keep some powder dry.

**Chip Wood** was the first news editor of *The Review of the News* and also wrote for *American Opinion*, our two predecessor publications. He is now the geopolitical editor of *Personal Liberty Digest*, where his *Straight Talk* column appears twice a month. This article first appeared in [PersonalLiberty.com](#) and has been reprinted with permission.



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