

《评白血病大雪山集体下跪：慈善事业容不得半点闹剧》

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A person kneeling for a donation may fetch press coverage, but for those in dire need, this tactic should be replaced by a proper safety net from the government, insurance companies and formal charities.

On June 30, a young man made headlines by kneeling in front of a corporate building to request financial help from its top executive.

Mo Xiangsong, a 21-year-old college student in Chengdu, Sichuan province, had been diagnosed with leukemia and unable to pay the medical bills. He sought help from New Hope Group - a prominent agribusiness operator headquartered locally, which boasts on its website of annual sales of around \$8.8 billion.

Specifically, he wrote on a plaque that he would like to "borrow" 1 million yuan (\$160,000) from Liu Chang, New Hope's chairwoman, who is said to have been paid an annual salary of 3 million yuan in 2013.

Mo was joined by 14 of his schoolmates, who all knelt down holding red roses in their hands.

Mo had a wreath on his head and another on his shoulder, in addition to a bunch of roses he held in his hands.

The meaning of the flowers, as suggested on the plaque, was "when you give a rose as a gift, you yourself will keep the fragrance", a figurative reminder that charitable giving is often in return for an uplifting of the soul.

Public opinion of the stunt was sharply divided.

Those who endorsed Mo said he did nothing wrong. They pointed out he did not steal, rob or cheat. All he wanted was to borrow money from a rich businesswoman and he promised to return it by working for her all his life. They insisted he didn't cross any legal or ethical line.

Mo's choice of seeking help was gimmicky, to say the least, but if you take his perspective, he didn't have many choices.

His family is not well-off and he had used up his parents' money for treatment.

Actually, his mother died shortly after he was born and his father lost his sanity. He was brought up by adoptive parents who are unable to support him financially through this difficult time.

His school had organized a variety of fundraisers, collecting an impressive 60,000 yuan - but that was hardly sufficient.

He had even resorted to laying on a public lawn to "scorch to death all the cancerous cells in my body". That attracted some local press, but less than 10,000 yuan more trickled in.

"I just want to survive," Mo says.

But the majority of feedback, as evidenced online, was critical.

Many suggested Mo's efforts amounted to little more than "moral blackmail".

Others viewed Mo's targeting of a business leader as cheap and contemptible.

It was the metaphorical cornering of a rich person to demand money for survival, they said, with the only difference being he felt he was on the moral high ground simply because he was a victim of poverty. Give him nothing, they added.

New Hope and its chairwoman never issued a statement, maybe thinking it would not be wise for them to give Mo money even if they wanted to, at least not publicly.

Maybe they thought it would be seen as caving in to blackmail, and soon legions of money seekers, with or without legitimate reasons, would be surrounding their offices.

Most big businesses and some of the superrich do put aside certain sums for charity, and each often has a particular area of interest.

At this particular stage of economic development in China, these philanthropic efforts are run probably by instinct.

The bridges that should exist between those who want to reach out and those who need a helping hand are largely non-existent.

Which corporate or personal charity foundation is most likely to extend assistance to a leukemia patient? I don't think there is an easy way to find out.

That makes room for people like Chen Guangbiao, the eccentric Chinese billionaire who has become notorious for publicity stunts.

I wrote recently of how he took out a full-page advert in the New York Times to invite 1,000 poor Americans to lunch.

"People say I should turn to Chen for help. I never thought of it, but I'll leave a message on his micro blog and see what happens," said Mo.

The irony is, Chen could not have foretold the success of Mo's stunt, or he may have been willing to help Mo.

Mo's plea to Chen, had it taken place before the press coverage, most likely would have become a needle in a haystack of similar requests - considering Chen's high profile.

It is sad that one has to make a show out of seeking or giving help. In this Internet age, a platform can easily be set up where two sides can have a free flow of information, which is accessible to all, and which can then be subject to public and professional scrutiny.

The cost of charity has been brought down dramatically from when a donor and the recipient were like two fish in a vast sea.

Still, many funds allocate so much money for administrative expenses that one has reason to suspect the real motive behind such endeavors.

What is truly missing here is a safety net in China's healthcare system that would catch those slipping through the cracks.

Philanthropy is not designed to cover all corners of society. A government-initiated nationwide program can guarantee that every citizen receives basic medical care.

The cost of such a program is so enormous that it goes beyond the capacity of any individual or corporation. It has to be funded with tax money, which means every citizen has to chip in, depending on his or her income.

In Mo's case, as long as his family income and medical condition are verified, he should be able to apply for this sort of government aid.

If the country's current economic situation makes it difficult to cover the total cost, there should be a mechanism of phasing in some financial assistance - for example, maybe waiving part of the costs at government-run hospitals.

As China grows in prosperity, those needing support will shrink and therefore the safety net can be larger and stronger.

On top of that, private businesses such as insurance companies have a role to play.

College students should be automatically enrolled under some kind of affordable plan, which, again, might not pay all of Mo's medical bills but at least could provide some kind of cushion.

The most ridiculous suggestion I read was that the families of Mo's 14 schoolmates should each put up 70,000

yuan to make up for the shortfall.

The same goes for the argument that healthcare professionals take a cut in their salary so that poor people can get treated.

Schools are in less of a position than corporate executives to shoulder such costs, and driving doctors' income artificially low will only serve to dissuade bright youngsters from entering the profession.

Those facing medical emergencies such as Mo may receive moral support from their friends - but it should be society as a whole, not someone who happens to be close to them, or a big name, who should be obliged or coerced into helping.

Maybe then, the surrendering of dignity or the staging of these kinds of tragically tinged farces will be unnecessary.

