

## FROM THE EDITOR

## What's in it for me?

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Several times this past week, I have heard this question in completely different contexts. Review a colleague's work. See an extra patient. Attend a meeting. Give an opinion. Of the hundreds of tasks that we perform both at work and at home, few really give us a sense of deep fulfillment. We cover call for colleagues when they are sick, offer to critique a project with fresh eyes or ears, or simply help others connect with mentors. As educators, we edit, rather painstakingly, draft manuscripts for students and residents. It is part of the job. However, it is not common to hear our ilk turn around and ask, "What's in it for me?" I wondered whether this was part of a new trend, generational gap, or simply the so-called February effect—as residents, physicians, and everyone else for that matter, we are tired and disgruntled.

The last time I heard this question was during a 7 pm run to Starbucks. I was grumpy, having spent an extra hour at work reviewing a last-minute report. This was yet another late day. I was feeling great pity for my tired self as I stood in line, hunched over my iPhone, pondering whether to have pastries or salad for dinner. Forget the salad, I

said, adopting the perfect Victim persona. I was mentally chastising myself for helping the colleague who couldn't see that I was buckling under the strain of a full clinic day where every patient showed up. In my mind, no one worked as hard as I did.

I was enjoying these feelings of under-appreciation when a nearby discussion piqued my interest. The group of teenagers in front of me was boisterous, loud, and debating the pros and cons of a last-minute project they had been given. Specifically, the teenagers were talking about doing some additional "busy work" in English class. Why should I do this project? What's in it for me? The questions and answers flew back and forth. Becoz. You want an A. An all-nighter won't kill you, man. By the end of the conversation, they decided, with good humor, that the teacher—while not their favorite—had treated them as adults and that they would graciously do the extra work. "Becoz." This was so contrary to my belief system; aren't teenagers the ones who make decisions by the seat of their pants? Just standing behind this group with their positive mojo had a more profound effect on me

than any Venti coffee drink. Here was a group of kids, late in the evening, also lamenting a busy day's work that culminated in more work. They figured out that saying "yes" was the right thing to do, simply because it was part of the work they had signed up for. Needless to say, by the time I made my way to the front of the line, I was ready to forgo the pastries in favor of passion tea and salad.

The teens reinforced my belief that we all do things to help others—just because it is part of our jobs. We try to coach colleagues, residents, and students with good intentions. As we rush headlong into the land of pay-for-performance and outcomes-based measures, we must not forget that there are some things that go way beyond any tangible measurable outcomes. Saying "no" is appropriate many times, but asking "what's in it for me?" may be a cry for help that all of us should heed. As a profession, we are the sum of our experiences. Sometimes doing things to make life easier for others is the right thing to do.

And learning often comes from unexpected sources; one has to be open minded.