

John Deffenbaugh blog – Coming to town

Santa Claus is coming to town later this month. If you, like me, believe in Santa, along with the Easter Bunny, Tooth Fairy and Great Pumpkin (it's an American thing, Google and you'll get it), you'll know the excitement and anticipation that Santa brings to kids of all ages.

But some kids don't get to experience the true benefit of Santa's trip to town. Who plays Santa for them? Neighbours, the community, volunteers, charities, companies, government? In Austerity Britain, along with Austerity US and Western Europe, it is the role of government that is coming under the closest scrutiny. Our Masterclass last summer touched on this subject, and NHS Top Leaders have two opportunities to consider this pivotal issue in 2013. After all, you are public servants, you are government.

The American cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead observed: **Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that has.** The pendulum swing post-war has been towards an interventionist state. Now that the tide is out, the resources are not there for the state to do everything. The trend has been in this direction since the tide went out in California in the 1980s, leading to the 'reinventing government' movement: **entrepreneurial government should steer more than they row.**

On **7 February** Top Leaders go on tour to Everton Football Club to hear about their initiative, Everton in the Community. We take as our provocation the assertion from Margaret Mead, and hear about **Big Society in Practice**. Is Everton just a football club, or does it have a wider mission? What business are you in? If your A&E is backed up and exceeding targets, should you be in the business of changing demand? What is meant by Big Society? Are we now past the slogan and onto something substantive?

You might be familiar with **adaptive** approaches to leadership. This is about giving back responsibility. Government, you, cannot solve everything, so the rationale here is to enable the owner of the problem to be the key to its solution. The problems causing demand on NHS resources can, in some respects, be tackled by a partnership approach that engages NHS leaders with their counterparts in the community, local government, companies, charities and citizen advocacy groups. This takes a different mindset, one that is beyond pacesetting, onto affiliation, participation, visioning. It's about eyes up to the possible, rather than rearranging the deckchairs. It's about a new approach to public policy.

This is where **David Brooks** comes in. He is the *New York Times* columnist and author of the bestseller "The Social Animal". I highly recommend the book, an insightful, engaging read, which for me can be summed up by his observation about the role of government: **Government should not run people's lives. That only weakens the responsibility and virtue of the citizens. Government could influence the setting in which lives are lived. Government could, to some extent, nurture settings that serve as nurseries for fraternal relationships. It could influence the spirit of the citizenry.**

David Brooks is headlining the **Masterclass on 21 June, hosted by Frontline – The Social Animal and Public Policy** – held at Kids Company in London. We will hear David's views on the role of government, public policy and his insight to The Social Animal. To get a preview, look at TED: http://www.ted.com/talks/david_brooks_the_social_animal.html. Then read the book.

The Masterclass on 21 June will draw both on David in the morning and the work of Kids Company in the afternoon. Camila Batmanghelidjh, founder of Kids Company, will make the link of David's insight to the work of her social enterprise as it tackles the problems that kids experience. Top leaders will have time to get hands-on insight to how Camila and her team provide services to vulnerable kids. More on this blockbuster day to follow.

Santa, in whatever form, will have come and gone by next June, but as kids look forward to Santa, then Top Leaders can look forward to David Brooks coming to town.

John Deffenbaugh 13 Dec 2012