

## This I Believe

John C. Cavanaugh, Chancellor  
Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education

I believe that sometimes one must receive graciously and completely what others offer you. I didn't come to this conclusion easily or directly. It was a tough thing, because like most people, I was taught that it is better to give than to receive. That philosophy, though, caused me problems. If I'm always supposed to be on the giving side of the equation, how was I supposed to accept unconditional love and support? How was I supposed to accept the gift of an education provided to me by my parents and all my great teachers and mentors who provided me the tools needed to be successful in life? How was I supposed to accept the grace of forgiveness from compassionate others when I was truly sorry for choosing the wrong path?

I started thinking about something else I'd been taught—that I should do unto others as I would have them do unto me. Sure, most of the emphasis was still on the doing unto others part, reinforcing that it is better to give than to receive. But eventually I realized something. If the Golden Rule is the basis for how I am to act, I must remember that it has two parts. There is the doing/giving part, and the being-done-unto/receiving part. It dawned on me that doing/giving, must be grounded in being-done-unto/receiving, grounded in my ability to graciously and completely accept the gift that another is giving to me. Simply put, I realized that I needed to allow someone to be that "other" who "does unto me," and to do so with deep reverence and gratitude. Why? Because in order to give from the heart, we have to be able to receive in the heart.

When I do or give, I am in control, consciously or unconsciously, because I choose what, when, and how to give. In contrast, in order to be-done-unto or receive graciously and completely, I am forced to be open, to really experience and listen to what someone else is trying to do or give. Most important, I have to give up control to receive well. Ironically, some of the most popular electronic gadgets are nearly perfect receivers. A new iPod is open to receiving whatever audio or video input it is given. The iPod challenges me. How open am I to receiving the love being offered by a family member? How open am I to receiving the wisdom of the teacher who offers a new idea or way of thinking? How open am I to receiving nature's beauty in all its forms?

To be sure, heartfelt doing/giving is very important. Still, I believe receiving graciously and completely is much more difficult; it's the secret, overlooked side of the Golden Rule. A good life is one enriched with both. I know. I learned that from my parents, friends, teachers/mentors, and especially my wife. See for yourself—good givers-receivers are around us if we pay attention. We just need to receive their examples.