

Stop blaming the panhandlers, blame the people who give to them

Panhandling in New Bedford is a hot topic. It used to be the Paul Revere sign that welcomed tourists to New Bedford, but now it's panhandlers with signs. You can't drive a main road in New Bedford without seeing at least one person standing at a busy intersection holding a sign asking for money. On most days you'll even see a couple, one pregnant, working the busy intersection at Union Street and Route 18. On some days you'll see a guy sitting on a rocking chair barely paying attention, but still making money. It wasn't always like this.

Why do panhandlers do what they do? It's because panhandling pays off and it only works because people continue to give them money. Why does it seem that more and more panhandlers are popping up in New Bedford? Because panhandlers go where the money is and word spreads quickly.

Solving the panhandling issue is very simple; stop giving them money and they will go away. It's 100% scientific. But ... but ... they will starve! Wrong.

It's debatable where most of the panhandling money goes, but people in New Bedford are not panhandling for food. **There are over a dozen food pantries in New Bedford**, not counting the good folks at Mobile Loaves and Fishes who feed people dinner six days a week from a food truck and Mercy Meals and More who feed people breakfast 6 days a week. The **\$2 million Sister Rose House** is nearly complete and will offer shelter and food daily. I think most people that give to a panhandler feel they are helping to feed someone, but in most cases that is simply not true.

Panhandlers are mostly young men and women physically capable

of working. Notice I used the word *physically*. Most of the panhandlers are not *mentally* capable of working though. Laziness, an inability to follow rules, or simply an outright unwillingness to live a structured life is what you will mostly find. In some cases the ability to pass a CORI check is lacking. You will also find that a large percentage of panhandlers in New Bedford are from another city.

As long as I can remember there have been spammers and scammers on the internet. A day doesn't go by without spam or some scam in my inbox. Why is that so? Because people fall for spam and scams. People don't continue to send spam/scams unless thousands of people are responding to them. There are thousands of Nigerian princes scamming people and folks selling tons of discount Viagra thus keeping the spam and scams alive. If people would stop falling for the spam/scams through e-mail the spammers and scammers would go away. If people would stop giving money to panhandlers they would go away. No one will stand (or sit on a rocking chair) for hours at an intersection, make no money and decide that it makes sense to come back the next day. They will migrate where the money is, away from New Bedford.

Do I blame the panhandlers, Nigerian princes or discount Viagra dealers for making easy money? Not at all. The blame falls on the shoulders of the people giving money to them. Stop doing it. A better idea would be to donate to charity or tip service workers 50%. You can feel good about yourself and you'll actually make a difference.