

Don't pick up the baby

I've been to India four times. India has been described as a "shock to the senses"—what you see, hear, smell, taste, and feel often seems otherworldly.

It's also difficult to grasp how populous the country is. One of my hosts tried to explain by saying: "There are more honor students (top 10% of the class) in India than there are students in America, simply because there are so many high school students in India."

On the first day of my first trip to India, my host warned me: "Don, while in New Delhi, you will probably be approached by a woman carrying a baby. She will try to engage with you, show you a beautiful infant, and then she will offer to let you hold the baby. Do not take the baby in your arms because the woman will walk away and the baby will be yours. Then you'll have to find an orphanage to take it, or you'll have to place the baby down on the sidewalk and walk away (children are sometimes abandoned on the streets by desperate mothers). Whatever you do, *don't pick up the baby.*"

I've thought of that story often. The moral of the anecdote is: think carefully before you get involved in, or become responsible for, something that is not your responsibility and something that may incumber you for a long time. It may be a kind and generous act that you're contemplating, but think carefully before committing.

Sometimes you may be called upon to "pick up the baby" because it *is* your baby—for instance, accepting responsibility for a family member. But sometimes the "baby" may be a friend, employee, or neighbor, in which case you *do* have a choice whether or not to get involved. If you do pick it up, know when and how to put it down.

Leaders:

1. Think carefully before taking a position with an organization that is spiraling downward. You may be "picking up" something you'll later wish you hadn't.
2. When selecting team members, go slow and be sure; it's easy to hire but hard to fire. When selecting team members don't be naive or unduly empathetic toward questionable candidates. Don't pick up the baby.

Individually:

1. Be wise and vigilant before committing to primary relationships (spouse, having children) because they're hard to disengage from.
2. If you have "picked up a baby" consider if and how you can "put it down."

This is a difficult topic.