



GENEROSITY

By Wayne Visser

~ Generosity is sharing that which you can least afford to give ~

Who do you know that is particularly generous?
How would you describe them?
Do they give without expecting anything in return?

We all know people like that (perhaps you are even one of them) – people who are always there to help, who share what they have, no matter how little or much that may be. They rightly deserve our admiration, for we live in selfish times, all caught up in the age of the individual – my needs, my rights, my wants, my desires – it's all about "me".

Seemingly, it is no longer fashionable for individual aspirations to play second fiddle to community responsibilities.

In fact, if the rhetoric of commercial advertising is to be believed, our pursuit of personal happiness through self-pampering is not only desirable, but it's our God-given right.

It is easy to become cynical in such a world, especially when we secretly admit our own complicity in perpetuating the myth of self-centred fulfilment. But then a disaster happens, a catastrophe strikes, and the outpouring of public generosity revives our faith in humanity again.

Why does it so often take a crisis to bring out the best in us? People pull together to fight a common cause. There is a sense of camaraderie that is infectious. Suddenly, we find ourselves tapping into one of the most powerful human drives – the desire to make a positive difference.

Somehow, dramatic events manage to penetrate our psychological armour of indifference, reaching through and touching our emotions. Crises invoke empathy. We find ourselves thinking: what if that had been me? And often, it so easily could have been – there, but for fortune, go you or I.

But what happens when the calamity slips back out of the headlines? Does our generosity go back into hibernation? And what about the much larger, creeping disasters – the slow, insidious killers like Aids and cancer, poverty and climate change? What will trigger our generosity when the needs seem so overwhelming, so persistent, so far away, so unlike to affect me?

It is clear that we cannot rely on melodrama and CNN to draw out the spirit of generosity that lies like a sleeping giant inside us all. Perhaps reciprocity is a more reliable catalyst for giving – you reap what you sow, what goes around comes around.

This is the ancient law of karma and the modern law of physics – every action has a reaction. It may seem rather selfish as a basis for generosity, to only give in the hope of receiving back in return.





But then again, bargaining for favours is more endemic than we are willing to admit. Even religious injunctions to generosity are laced with promises of heaven's reward – pay now, collect later.

Or maybe we are overcomplicating things.
Think of the last time you acted with generosity.
How did it make you feel?
Good, right?
So generosity is nothing but enlightened self-interest.

Even so, what does it really mean to be generous?
To be charitable, of course, but in what way?

Generosity is being willing to give what we have least of – be it money, or time, or patience. You can be generous with your donations, your attention or your love. Generosity is also giving fully what we have most of – especially our talents and skills. We should not underestimate the importance of sharing our highest potential.

Being the best we can be – finding our calling and following it – may be one of the most generous things any of us can do.
Because, ultimately, generosity is all about giving of yourself.



Part of the EVERYDAY INSPIRATION series

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