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5 Ways to Give Freely (Regardless of Your Budget)

“Giving is like love. To experience its full reward, it must be offered freely.”

This is one of our Holiday Thoughts – and perhaps one of the most powerful. And I’m not just talking about the gifts themselves—but of the expectations and fears and all of the other things tied up with the act of giving anything, from an actual gift to the gift of our time, attention, and effort. We all want to be liked, to be loved, to be accepted—and we give of ourselves knowing full well that there is the chance of rejection (“*What if she hates the sweater?*” to “*What if he doesn’t really love me?*”).

And that’s why during this time of year it’s that much more critical to commit to the act of giving giving freely. By that I mean: without expectation or fear. Without worrying if you’ll get back what you give out, or if you’ll get hurt in the process. When you practice giving on every level to the people around you, you’ll not only experience the power and thrill of giving more, but you’ll also feel...relieved.

Why? For the very same reason giving is better than receiving: because it gives you a break—from relentless self-criticism, from self-absorption, from the stress of holiday grief—and shifts your focus elsewhere.

As bioethicist Stephen Post, PhD, author of [Why Good Things Happen to Good People](#), has found, giving has amazingly powerful effects on our mood and health, such as quieting anxiety, facilitating self-forgiveness, and reducing mortality.

Yes, with giving, there's always a risk—of vulnerability, hurt, disappointment. You might not get perfect acknowledgement or immediate solace in return. This season, even if your heart feels low--no, because of that--make it a practice to give freely, without fear, without condition or suspicion. Here are 5 powerful ways to give.

1. Perform a Random Act of Kindness

It's a simple thing, but don't underestimate it. With a drop of kindness, you connect with someone, inspire more kindness, and enjoy a little hit of dopamine, too.

- Treat a friend. When you spring for the check, you're investing in the relationship—and showing them that you value their company.
- Let someone cut you in line. Especially if she seems anxious or in a hurry.
- Leave a bigger tip. Just because: Because you can, because no one ever went broke tipping (especially if you can afford to eat out in the first place), because that person is working hard to serve you and doesn't expect it. And because you will remind her that there are good things that happen, sometimes for no reason at all.

2. Be a Mentor

If you have the energy, giving your time and talents, sound advice, and full attention are generous acts, and being a mentor combines all three.

- Take an interest in the new hires or interns at your company. They're dying to get involved and could use a sounding board.
- Advocate for someone. A new talent in your field without your connections may have a hard time getting their foot in the door. Make a few recommendations on his or her behalf.

3. Show up

You don't have to make a huge entrance or big plans. Your time and presence is the most thoughtful gift, especially when everyone's running around crazed. Keep it simple.

- Accept an invite. Going to a party or other event isn't just about face time; it communicates that these people matter.
- Be on time. If you make plans to be at a restaurant by noon, be there at 11:55. You show respect for the other person's time.

4. Choose charities thoughtfully

While spontaneous giving is critical during crises, planning helps you maximize your efforts—especially this time of year. You can also take time to find organizations that align with your values and priorities, thereby connecting you to a wider community.

- Decide who to support and why (as opposed to whomever happens to ask).
- Choose a donation strategy. What makes sense with your budget and interest: Is it \$25 a month? One big annual gift each holiday season?
- Organize a group give. If you'd like to make an even bigger impact, rally a team to pursue a giving goal together, whether it's helping out with a clothing drive or participating in Toys for Tots.

5. Think charitable thoughts

It's true—just thinking about giving matters. As Post says [on his site](#),

"The simple act of praying for others...reduces the harmful impact of health difficulties in old age for those doing the praying. Another study from the National Institutes of Health shows that merely making a decision to donate to a charity increases activity in parts of the brain that release our feel-good chemicals, dopamine and serotonin." (source: whygoodthingshappen.com)

Even just changing the way you think about, talk about, and frame situations (say, calling it holiday "bustle" instead of holiday "chaos" can make a huge difference in how you experience the seasons.

So when you feel the stress of loneliness and longing, turn your attention to where you can give next. Let the light in.

Let your light out. You'll see there are cracks in everything.

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