

ESSAY ON GENEROSITY

Generosity is the quality of those who are free giving, magnanimous and noble spirited. Generosity means giving freely of one's self for no other reason than the gift itself. Generosity is the gift of oneself in one form or another.

Generosity springs from a wide diversity of sources. The generous person raised by stingy parents may react against their parsimony. A generous person may be willing to share newfound wealth, out of empathy for the less fortunate. Generous persons of humble means may give their time freely to a worthwhile organization. Yet another generous person may simply wish to be liked and respected. And then, there are those for which the gift is everything...

Whatever the motivation, generosity is often misunderstood. Many suspect the generous person of ulterior motives. Very often, those who can't conceive of generosity themselves harbor this suspicion. They judge the generous according to their own bias of seeking profit or advantage for their own cause. Often, people who meet a generous person for the first time feel disquiet, like they're meeting someone from a different culture: they don't know how to behave.

Since generosity is misunderstood, sometimes even despised, it's difficult to be generous in this age of fixation on the self. Organizations deploring the fall-off of volunteerism are often guilty of discounting the contributions of their volunteers. Generosity is one of the more noble traits of human kind. Yet, we systematically distrust it, and those who demonstrate its goodness.

Generous people themselves seldom understand why their generosity is suspect. They give, and they feel punished for their gift: words are said about them, they are marginalized, motives are attributed to them, and they are made to feel that they have thrown "pearls before swine". Some few may begin to place conditions on their gift of time or money, to protect themselves from being hurt. After all, if their gift isn't respected, why should they open their hand and heart so widely?

Some people are not generous, but act that way. They give only to receive in return. They are the enemy of the truly generous person, because they spoil the act of giving for those who truly give. Generous business people are often most suspected. It seems that if you are in business, you can't be generous: you must have an angle. The many examples of business generosity seem not to matter: Carnegie's libraries, Rockefeller's Foundation, Ben and Jerry's social mission. The businessperson seems to be universally suspected of ulterior motives.

Fortunately for the world, generous people won't stop giving, because they can't. Generosity is in their very nature. That's why there will always be volunteers, no matter how poorly they're appreciated. And there will always be donors, despite what's said of them. It's those who don't appreciate the gift who are the poorer. After all, "What comes around, goes around".

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