

# Newsflash: Giving Is Good For You

*When We're Driven By A Genuine Spirit Of Generosity, Research Suggests We Prosper As Much As Those On The Receiving End.*

*Scott Holdman, Pat Traynor, and David Hunnicutt*

**P**roviding assistance to others can manifest itself in a variety of ways. To be sure, people can give of their treasures to charity. Moreover, volunteering time toward a noble cause is yet another way people can contribute to the greater good. In reality, there are countless ways people can give to others who are in need. Despite whatever route is chosen, one thing is for sure: people who give of their time and resources, receive multiple benefits in return.

Here are eight ways that giving is good for you.



## Giving Enhances Your Health

Recent research indicates that giving—both in terms of tangible assets and time—enhances human health. In fact, this observation has been studied and documented ever since the introduction of a groundbreaking study by House, Landis and Umberson in 1988 in which the authors documented that helping others and connecting socially improved health as much or more than quitting smoking, reducing blood pressure, losing weight and increasing exercise levels. What's more, this positive effect occurred across all kinds of relationships no matter what the gender, age or country of origin. The bottom line is this: being socially connected and giving to others is good for your health.

## Giving Elevates Your Mood

It comes as no surprise that people are often motivated to provide help when they witness distressing events and circumstances experienced by others. Fundamentally, this is a very good thing—and when we see it happen it restores and/or reinforces our faith in humanity. What's remarkable, however, is the fact that providing assistance to those in need actually provides a “bump” in the level of feel-good neurochemicals in the brains of those who are helping. Indeed, a research team led by neuroscientist Jorge Moll at the National Institutes of Health discovered that when people give of their time and money they experience a phenomenon known as the “helper's high.” Specifically, it appears

that doing something good for another who is in need activates the brain to release these “feel-good” neuromodulators (e.g., vasopressin and oxytocin). When released, these two chemicals create a profound feeling of satisfaction—so much so that they can even be addictive leading to a virtuous cycle (which means that the person doing the actual giving feels so good by helping that they do it again and again and again).

from person to person to person. And, what’s more, when people benefit from kindness, they have a tendency to “pay it forward” by helping others who were not originally involved which, in turn, creates a cascade of cooperation that influences dozens more in a social network.’ The results of this amazing finding suggest that each “helping contribution” a person makes to the public good is tripled over the course of time

#### ⋮ AT-A-GLANCE

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- #1:** Giving enhances your health
- #2:** Giving elevates your mood
- #3:** Giving creates contagion
- #4:** Giving will help you live longer
- #5:** Giving makes you happy
- #6:** Giving enhances your social network and improves your relationships
- #7:** Giving stimulates a sense of empathy and gratitude
- #8:** Giving increases the likelihood that others will do nice things for you

### Giving Creates Contagion

One of the most surprising research findings of its kind is the fact that good acts—acts of kindness, generosity and cooperation—spread in a contagion-like fashion across social networks. Interestingly, it takes only a handful of individuals to create this domino-like effect. This revelation, announced by the University of California News Center and researchers James Fowler and Nicholas Christakis, suggest that because ‘cooperative and helping behavior is contagious, it spreads

because other people are directly or indirectly influenced and contribute their efforts to a cause as a consequence. Knowing this, each act of kindness really can make the world a better place.

### Giving Will Help You Live Longer

Another surprising benefit of giving to others is that it has a profound impact on longevity. In fact, researchers have clearly documented that giving time and/or resources not only increases one’s quality of life, but also

maximizes the amount of time that person will spend on this planet. Interestingly, a group of researchers from California studied a cadre of older residents and examined their volunteering habits. Those folks that made themselves available for volunteering opportunities reduced their chances of dying by a whopping 63% as compared to those who did not make volunteering a priority.

These findings have been replicated by other researchers and further demonstrate the impact that giving and volunteering have on longevity. Perhaps what's most interesting about this particular benefit is that researchers suggest that this bump in longevity is due to the fact that giving helps to bolster an identity of independence and usefulness to others—thus providing a sense of purpose and a reason to get up every day and “keep on keeping on.”

*“A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.”*  
— Proverbs 11:25

## Giving Makes You Happy

For many, it's hard to imagine that sacrificing for others can actually lead to a happier and more hopeful disposition. But according to recent research, it does appear to be the case. Indeed, Lalin Anik and colleagues in an article entitled, *Feeling Good About Giving: The Benefits And Costs Of Self-Interested Charitable Behavior*, relate that giving contributes to a greater sense of happiness—and it appears to be a circular phenomenon. Specifically, “the

evidence is quite supportive: happier people give more and giving makes people happier, such that happiness and giving may operate in a positive feedback loop (with happier people giving more, getting happier, and giving even more).” And in a time where bad news and challenging circumstances seem to surround us, charitable giving may be one of the things that can help us to be happier and more hopeful in our daily lives.

## Giving Enhances Your Social Network And Improves Your Relationships

Another benefit of giving is that it enhances your social network and improves your relationships. Indeed, when you volunteer or give monetarily, you become part of a caring, united and cohesive group. By becoming part of this community, you will be afforded numerous chances to meet new people and to make new friends. During your time together, you will have ample opportunity to demonstrate that you care about others and value those relationships. In so doing, others will reciprocate by drawing closer to you. In turn, this dynamic interaction will not only make a difference in someone else's life, but it will also improve your social support and strengthen your network—thus giving you a greater feeling of belonging to something greater than yourself.

## Giving Stimulates A Sense Of Empathy And Gratitude

Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another—and it is a particularly valuable emotion and a concrete benefit of charitable giving. Specifically, when we see others in need, we literally can feel their pain. This emotion is known as empathy and it creates an internal distress which

signals us to take action—most often in the forms of providing assistance or monetary support. In so doing, by helping others we relieve some of the distress that we are experiencing and that makes us feel better. In fact, our brains—once again—stimulate the production of oxytocin and our mood gets a significant boost. And, if that's not enough, we then experience a profound sense of gratitude which is the quality of being thankful and stems from our readiness to demonstrate kindness towards others.

In this glorious cycle of demonstrating empathy and experiencing gratitude, we encounter the very best benefits that charitable giving has to offer.

## Giving Increases The Likelihood That Others Will Do Nice Things For You

Last, but certainly not least, is the fact that charitable giving increases the likelihood that others will do nice things for you in return. And although this is one of those benefits of charitable giving that is least likely to be sought after, researchers suggest that it is indeed the case. In fact, numerous researchers in multiple situations have demonstrated that when an individual receives an act of kindness from someone else, they are much more inclined to make it a point to return the favor. What's more, many will go to great lengths to make sure that the person demonstrating the kindness knows and understands how much their generosity is valued and appreciated.

Even though you may not have given for this reason, it is essential that you show kindness and gratitude in accepting thanks and reciprocity because there are many recorded instances where people who receive a charitable contribution feel guilty because

they are in need and somehow placing a burden on another human being. By accepting their reciprocating kindness, you can elevate their dignity and self-worth. Oh, and by the way, there is also the reality that if people know that you are generous in your contributions toward helping others, they will also help you in your time of need. ●

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS & IMPACT FOUNDATION

**Scott Holdman** is the Impact Institute's Director of Amazement. He is an innovator in nonprofit fundraising who, through training and coaching, helps charities as they solve complex community challenges.

**J. Patrick Traynor** is the President of Dakota Medical Foundation. In 2005, Pat led the establishment of Impact Foundation. His visionary leadership has helped to make the Dakota Medical Foundation and Impact Foundation a force for good in North Dakota and western Minnesota.

**Dr. David Hunnicutt** is the CEO of David Hunnicutt Int'l. He is a sense-maker, simplifier and the arch-enemy of underperforming cultures. Obsessed with helping leaders create breathtaking change, he is inspired to do cool stuff daily.

**Impact Foundation** offers resources that equip social and businesses entrepreneurs to accomplish their missions. Specifically, the Impact Foundation 1) instructs nonprofit leaders on how to master fundraising and 2) shows businesses how to secure government contracts that deliver capital essential to their bottom lines, growth and job retention.

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