

## Why People Donate

By Joseph Parish



The age-old question of why people donate has been the quest of non-profit groups for a vast number of years. If they were only ever able to solve that question, they will surely have all the needed funds necessary to accomplish each of their goals over the upcoming years. Manatees in Florida might need to be saved, and the rare White Lions found in Africa are certainly in short supply, and should be protected, however the burning question is still, why do people who do not know these creatures donate their hard-earned money in support of their cause? Perhaps it is nothing more than to feel good about themselves, after all human beings are inherently empathetic.

In the physiological sense our fragile bodies are quickly rewarded with a dose of dopamine whenever we help other people. Dopamine is an organic chemical which plays an important role in the brain as a neurotransmitter which results in the release of neurons, which send signals to our other nerve cells of the body. In Psychology Today they stated that one of the major pathways of dopamine plays a major role in reward-motivated types of behavior. Rewards will increase the dopamine levels within the body. This happy chemical release within our brain works over, and over again each, and every time we offer a donation to a cause.

This is all well, and good, however, there appears to be a deeper moral factor involved than just body chemistry. Often a donor will feel that even a small contribution would help the overall effort, whether it is to save the seals, or feed children. Oftentimes, the issue at hand may seem impossible to resolve, but human nature as it is possessing

a strong amount of faith in their intended goal, and believe they are able to make a difference.

Research has demonstrated that the act of spending money on ourselves fail to increase our appreciation of happiness, while freely giving directly to others correlates to an increase in our happiness. Thus, it is evident that happier people tend to give more, and the more they give the happier they become.

### **My donations**

I personally donate to several charities. During the bombing of the World Trade Center, and Hurricane Katrina, I sat glued to my chair watching in horror as the two dramas unfolded. I was simply awestruck that something of this magnitude could take place while we with all our technological advances were helpless to do anything about it. I observed desperate people leaping to their untimely death from the top floors of the Twin Towers, and imagining what must have been going through the poor soul's mind. I watched the TV coverage as the flooding took place in New Orleans while people scurried to find safety on the rooftops of their homes. Again, I saw no help in sight. My heart went out to the people, and survivors of both of these terrible calamities. All that I could do was to send a financial donation to help alleviate some of the ungodly pain, and suffering being experienced.

### **Salvation Army**

When a major disaster is not taking place, I donate to several charities, although perhaps not at the same time. During the Christmas holidays, I cannot pass up one of the red Salvation Army kettles as I continually search, and empty my pockets of loose change into them in passing. I am a firm believer that no child should be left without a gift at Christmas time. It does me good to see that possibly one, or two families will enjoy the holiday with a warm meal, and perhaps some gifts for the children. I like to contact several of the local charitable organizations at that time of the year, and find out about donating several presents to needy children.

### **Boy's Town**

Another organization which I frequently support is "Boy's Town" in Nebraska. This organization used to be known as "Father Flanagan's Boy's Home" but has since modified its name. This is the same home which inspired the 1938 movie "Boy's Town" starring Spencer Tracy. I can still recall the choked up feeling I got when I first watched this black and white movie as a youth (not in 1938). From its humble beginning this agency now boasts of 12 different regions across the nation caring for children that society has forgotten, and pushed through the floorboards. One of my imaginative thoughts has always been that if I ever win the lottery, I would start something similar to this with the earnings.

### **American Red Cross**

My third charity which I support is of course the Red Cross. I do this not so much because I previously worked there as a volunteer, but because I have personally seen the good that this organization is capable of. I have sat in a home and watched as a smile crossed a small toddler's face merely by being given a toy Teddy Bear (these are the toys we give to small children to help them cope). I have seen the face of hope as I handed a young couple a credit card to hold them over until they once again get on their feet from losing their home to a fire.

I would suppose that this was the concept that Clara Barton wanted to present when in 1881 she founded the American Red Cross. For the next twenty some years she helped where, and when she could whether it was here at home, or overseas. Today her founding agency continues to benefit national and global relief efforts every way they can. With its life saving blood drives, its health and safety programs, or through its international services the Red Cross is ready, and willing to assist any way they can.

### **Value in Disaster Recovery Operations**

The disaster relief efforts of the Red Cross support the response of over 70,000 events around the nation which includes earthquakes, house fires, hurricanes, tornados and a host of other emergency issues. In house fires alone (which is the department where I worked in), represents the largest disaster threat to the American family. It is not unusual that the Red Cross responds to a house fire every eight minutes. We were on call 24 hours per day, seven days per week. As you can see the American Red Cross provides valuable support to federal and state agencies on an ongoing basis.

Before I depart, I would like to leave you with a slight bit of Red Cross trivia. I doubt that many people realize that although the Red Cross is not supported by the federal government, they **MUST** deploy on an emergency assignment if directed by the government. When I took my very first class entitled, "Fulfilling Our Mission" I was totally taken back when this was mentioned. This is but another feather in the hats of the Red Cross organization.