

GENEROSITY OF SPIRIT

What is Generosity of Spirit?

Generosity of spirit refers to the willingness to share openly with others for no other reason than that you enjoy giving.

Why is it important to have generosity of spirit?

According to Stephen Post in his article, *The Joy of Giving* (<http://blogs.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-joy-giving>), "Over the centuries spiritual and moral thinkers have prescribed ways of living that lead to greater happiness over the course of a lifetime, and the best of them from Socrates to Buddha, from Jesus to Maimonides, have powerfully lived out what they thought. The goal of a good life, they agreed, is a deep happiness consistent with simplicity, integrity and a profound generosity.

So if it makes sense to live a generous life, then it can also make sense to approach our professional lives with the same philosophy.

And the business "gurus" agree. In their book, *The Go-Giver*, Bob Burg and John David Mann craft a wonderful little story about a young man who transforms from a "go-getter" to a "go-giver" by following the mentoring advice of some successful people who all followed the same five "laws" of Value, Compensation, Influence, Authenticity and Receptivity.

The book beautifully describes how having a focus of giving, not out of obligation but out of desire, creates the type of environment where fulfilment happens for the individual and those they engage with.

Imagine you're at a networking function and just about everyone is passing around business cards and giving their ten-second sales speech. Ever get the feeling they're just there to "get" something from you and everyone else in the room but that they're not offering to "give" much?

This is an excellent example because if the person who is "networking to get" changes their focus to one of "networking to give", and asks the people they engage with about themselves, what they need or are looking for, and then builds connections for them (even if it's not with their own business), then that person develops a reputation as generous of spirit.

People are generally more attracted to generous people. Stronger and more fulfilling relationships are usually possible when there is a reciprocal giving nature versus a one-sided giving structure to the relationship.

And there is a substantial amount of evidence in the world of Positive Psychology which demonstrates that when we give to others, we are supporting the development of our own self-esteem. We value ourselves and our abilities more, and we enjoy the feeling of fulfilling the needs of others.

The key however, is to do it sincerely and with authenticity, or else the “giving” is degraded.

Why is it so easy to slip up in the area of generosity of spirit?

There are a couple of key areas from which lack of generosity of spirit can arise.

The first of these is where an individual simply isn't thinking from a “giving” framework. Sometimes we can be so focused on our own needs that we don't consider the needs of others. When someone is judged on this, they can often be called selfish, however that may not always be the case. The person could be “self-full” meaning that they have to honour their own needs as a priority in their lives for the time being. That said, the risk is certainly there for some people not to think about how their own needs AND the needs of others can both be met at the same time. A number of paradigms can get “in the way” such as competition, when the goal is to grab the piece of the pie before someone else does, or focusing on the pressures of their own situation without acknowledging that others may be experiencing stress as well. There are many variables to this of course, and it essentially comes down to the prioritisation of one's own needs over the needs of anyone else. In this model, someone always loses out, and likely both/all parties.

The other is where the individual feels they have nothing to “give” and so they don't try. Worse, it could be someone who feels they give all the time, but feels that their own needs aren't being met, so they begin to feel resentful or that they've run out of their own “giving” capacity. These frameworks can often be linked with matters around self-esteem, self-worth, and learning how to honour ones own needs as being as valid and important as being there for others. Again, there is a commonality here with the first risk area, where a thinking pattern exists that suggest only one side of the relationship can have their needs met, resulting in one or more people losing out.

The key message is that attending to one's own needs never means that the needs of the other can't also be met. Focus on achieving mutually beneficial outcomes for all, a win-win situation, and you'll feel more satisfied and fulfilled as will those you give to.

Tips for being generous of spirit

- Focus on asking others what their needs are, and then you can share your own.
- Discuss and find ways of ensuring other people's needs are met, and balance out the conversation, where appropriate, with brainstorming how your needs can be met.
- Look for ways to “make someone's day” by simply giving. Random acts of kindness are often a great strategy to feel wonderful while making someone else feel wonderful.
- In your professional life, look for how you can add the most value possible to the relationships you have with colleagues, vendors and partners and of course, to customers.
- Take stock of all you have to offer others, including your knowledge and wisdom, skills, characteristics, time and energy. The more you know you have to offer, the greater the chances you'll leverage your strengths to support yourself and others in a practical and meaningful way.

- Be open to receiving as well. It's all well and good to give to others, but if you're not also open to receiving from others, including new business, then you'll end up with an unequal equation that over time could mean everyone loses out.

Characteristics and/or Behaviours of a person who is generous of spirit

- They ask about others needs.
- They offer solutions, make referrals to competitors, and go out of their way to follow through on commitments made.
- They think about the needs of the community, society, the planet (as is appropriate to their environment) and consider the needs of the many versus just their own needs.
- They are grateful for what they have, including their strengths and abilities.
- They encourage others to give as well.
- They seek permission before they give and check in on the ways others want to be given to.
- They are positive far more often than they whinge.
- They see the potential is everyone to be able to contribute positively to the whole.

Evaluate your own perspective on generosity of spirit

- What does "Generosity of Spirit" mean to you? How do you recognise the attitude AND behaviours when you see them in yourself and/or others?
- Do you have any "conditions" or "rules" on how and when you give? For example, if someone came up to you on the street and asked you for money, would you give it to them? Would it make any difference if they said they were going to use the money for alcohol and drugs? What would you do if it was a woman with her four children sitting on the curb and the mother asked you if you could feed her kids as they haven't eaten in two days? If you answered differently to any of these questions, then you likely have conditions about giving in certain situations. There is no judgement necessary here...just be honest and explore. If you don't like your own answers, you can choose to change.
- What are your strengths in terms of giving? How do you leverage these and for what purpose?
- What are your opportunities for improvement in terms of giving? What specifically could change and who would benefit from the change and how?
- How do you feel when you give?

- How do you feel when, for any reason, you cannot give at all, or you can't give the way someone would prefer?
- What's the greatest lesson, personally and/or professionally, you've learnt regarding giving?

Improve your degree of generosity of spirit

After you have completed your evaluation, if you have noticed some room for improvement, you might like to try some of the following strategies:

- Seek out a person (or persons) who you believe consistently demonstrate "generosity of spirit". Interview them and ask them questions about their own development process to get to where they are now. Consider that this is a mentoring session where it may be expected that you will make a commitment to this person at the end of the interview and that it'll be necessary for you to follow through.
- Do some journal writing about giving, generosity and altruism. It may help if you do some research on the internet and/or in books and use the journal to track your own insights. If you take up this option, you may want to look for stories of successful business people who talk about giving as part of their success. Bill and Melinda Gates are good examples for this.
- Create a personal/professional development plan around generosity of spirit based on your self evaluation insights. You may need to select someone to help you keep accountable to that plan, such as a coach, mentor, colleague, friend or family member.
- Consider getting coached or mentored on this area (or any other area you'd like to develop) and work with the coach to determine the actual habits which are effective and those which are negatively impacting your performance in the area of generosity of spirit. If you're not sure where to start to look for a coach or mentor, the High Ideals member directory includes members who offer these services, which may be a good place to begin your search as you'll know that those practitioners have also achieved the High Ideals credentials.

Further resources

If you would like to develop further in the area of generosity of spirit, the following resources may be worth considering.

Please note that High Ideals does not endorse or receive any direct benefit from recommending the following resources. The list is simply a suggestive collection of materials that members of the High Ideals management team have found useful in their own development.

- **The Go-Giver** by Bob Burg and John David Mann – This is a brilliant little book about the transformation of a young man from a “go-getter” to a “go-giver” and the remarkable business results one can get from giving well and wisely. There are five “laws” in the book that are easy to explore in a relevant and practical way.
- **The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success** by Deepak Chopra.
- <http://blogs.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-joy-giving> - The Psychology Today blog has a special section just on the Joy of Giving, written by a number of experts in the field, including Stephen Post who has been referenced in this document.
- <http://www.actsofkindness.org/> - This is the Random Acts of Kindness Foundation’s website, which has fantastic information on various ways of giving.
- <http://learningtogive.org/resources/folktales/> - Learning to Give is a wonderful site which includes a curriculum and training resources, including stories, which can help both children and adults understand the value and benefits of giving. It is a service of The League, found at <http://leagueworldwide.org/>
- <http://www.mindtools.com/> is a site High Ideals often refers people to as it is an incredible resource to assist people in developing their own professional skills regardless of whether they run their own business or work for someone else.
- <http://www.selfgrowth.com/> is a site High Ideals often refers people to as it offers both personal and professional self-development information and resources. You can type in any search word you want, such as “giving and receiving feedback” and you’ll get a list of articles, blogs, resources and links to other sites which could assist you in your own development.
- <http://www.high-ideals.com> – Check out the Member Directory section for High Ideals members who offer services which could support you, such as coaching, mentoring or consulting on High Ideals criteria/values.

Author and editor acknowledgement

High Ideals would like to acknowledge and thank Noel Posus for his work on this document. Noel Posus is the Director of Training, Research and Development for High Ideals as well as a professional coach, educator and author. To find out more about Noel, please visit his profile on the High Ideals directory by clicking [here](#) and search by name.

This document is part of the **High Ideals** Criteria Information Series, edited by Claire Stretch. For more information on Claire please visit her profile on the High Ideals directory by clicking [here](#) and search by name.

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