

## The hottest gift of the season: Your Community

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*"Once again, we come to the Holiday Season, a deeply religious time that each of us observes, in his own way, by going to the mall of his choice."*

Dave Barry

As we come to the climax of commercials for the holiday season, most of us can easily be brainwashed into running around stores to pick up gifts for the beloved individuals in our lives. While we have the best intentions that these gifts will fulfill the needs of our friends and families *'that they wouldn't buy for themselves'* both parties are usually left with the guilt of giving and receiving too much. For a reminder look in two places: 1) at the bottom of January's Visa bill and 2) and in the back of your storage closet.

Unfortunately, there is a reason *we don't buy certain things for ourselves*. While many of us will not be able to make personal purchases during this holiday season (when everyone else rightfully comes first), I hope more will, deep down inside, realize that we don't really need these material gifts.

I have often found myself buying gifts for family members that they would not have otherwise bought for themselves. Why would my brother-in-law ever need a pocket-sized butane torch? In fact, he didn't. He didn't utter these words, but when he opened it, the look on his face said it and deep down inside, I knew it before I even bought it.

I have been on the receiving end of this absurdity too. Gifts for me, with the most personal of intentions, end up being returned, or worse, relegated to the closet, tags attached, only to be discovered years later during a space-making crusade. My Nana had a saying for this, spoken in the sweetest tone, after opening yet another gift; *'Oh... now you shouldn't have done that!'*

Have you ever found that you really *'shouldn't have?'*

Our culture is slowly realizing that bigger is not always better and our number of *'impossible to buy for'* people increases each year. Material gifts do not increase our happiness (on both sides of giving and receiving), and therefore, it makes sense that charitable donations are seeing a surge in popularity. Philanthropy, or simply charitable giving, has moved from the elite to the everyday in a little over one hundred years. Most of us have received a gift that arrives in a greeting card and reads, *"A donation has been made to the African White Pygmy Rhinoceros Reserve... in your honour."* A gift like this doesn't leave a guilt hangover or fill the top shelf in your closet. This gift fulfills a need.

The slowing economy (how many times have you heard this today?) has brought hardship to the once carefree and semi-affluent, who may never have given non-profit organizations a second thought. The

new cohort relying on these services will cause an acute stress on charities that already had their hands full before credit tightened and jobs disappeared.

So unless you are absolutely sure that you know what gift will make your friends and family ecstatic, why not look up your local charities and donate time or money in their honour. Your investment will remain in the community, supporting those in need, financing projects that improve our quality of life and, ultimately, minimizing the effect of these tough economic times for years to come. That is much more than any pocket-sized butane torch could do and I'll bet you won't hear 'Oh you shouldn't have' during the entire holiday season.

*"It is not how much you do, but how much love you put in the doing."*

Mother Teresa

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