

# 5 Tips for Meaningful Giving

Thoughtful giving leads to fulfillment.

By Debbie Johnson

Giving seems to reach a fever pitch each year in December. Here are a few tips for making sure you feel fulfilled from your giving.

## FOLLOW YOUR PASSION

Most of us support causes that are near and dear to our hearts. Create a list of causes and think about which of these really peak your interest. If a meaningful change for the better could take place for one of these causes, which one would really make you feel terrific? Push yourself to narrow it down to only a few so that you aren't spreading your donations and energies too thin. The best satisfaction generally comes from giving to what we care most about.

## CHOOSE CAREFULLY

Not all organizations are worthy of your hard-earned money or energies. The failure of Family Connections, right here in Austin, due to the executive director's theft, should make you realize that vetting the organizations that will receive your philanthropy is especially important. Making sure that they are financially stable and well-run are two steps in the right direction. There are many tools to help with this process, including [guidestar.org](http://guidestar.org) and [charitynavigator.org](http://charitynavigator.org).

## DECIDE HOW YOU WILL EVALUATE YOUR GIFT

In some cases, especially for small donations, you may want to make a gift and walk away without any follow-up. In the case of larger gifts and instances in which you are willing to make the time to stay involved, you may want to define a process for evaluating your gift. For example, did the program achieve the

expected results? What was learned as part of implementing the program? What changes will be made to improve results? Knowing the outcome of your donation will not only enable you to decide whether to give again, but to also feel gratified in closing the loop, good news or bad.

## GIVE JOYFULLY

Most of us approach philanthropy from the viewpoint of scarcity, worrying that we don't ever have enough so whatever we give needs to be carefully parsed from our seemingly meager resources. In reality, if we look at what we really need and then look at how much could be done with what's left over, many of us would give joyfully to help those causes that touch our hearts. In the words of Lynne Twist, professional philanthropist, "Money is a current, a carrier, a conduit for our intentions. Money carries the imprimatur of our soul."

## TIME IS MONEY

Don't forget that, in many cases, a gift of your time as a volunteer, and especially of a

specific skill such as fundraising, marketing or accounting, may be as welcome as money. A labor of love can be the best way to create a rewarding giving experience.

Many firms today are including a component of philanthropy in their business model so that they give a portion of their revenue or profits to charity. Purchasing from these companies can further leverage your philanthropy: You spend with companies that, in turn, give to good causes. Some great local examples are:

**GIVE REALTY:** Gives 25 percent of real estate commissions to the client's chosen charity

**HOTELS FOR HOPE:** For every hotel room booked, donates \$2 to a charity that benefits children

**GENEROUS ART:** Gives 40 percent of profits from art sold to nonprofits

**GIVE AS YOU GET:** A percentage of items purchased goes to your favorite nonprofit

**ALT-CREATIVE:** Gives 10 percent of profits from custom web projects to nonprofits

