

Aunt Bossy

Written by Susan Murphy

Tuesday, 07 April 2015 12:35 - Last Updated Wednesday, 08 April 2015 06:22



Gift Horsing Around

Dear Aunt Bossy,

It seems the older I get the more I am surrounded by people who need “help.” I am happy to help with both time and money, but don’t know how to figure out if it does any good.

□□□□□□□□□□ *When it comes to organized charities, I make sure I only give to those who have negligible administration costs and get most of the contributions into serving the needy.*

□□□□□□□□□□ *With the homeless, I figure a great number of them are mentally ill, and I used to avoid giving them money because I worried they would buy drugs or alcohol. Now, I just figure that isn’t my business.*

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□□□□□□□□□□ *How can I be certain I am helping and not just throwing money away?*

Gift Horse

Dear Gift Horse,

First, good for you. So many people who claim to care just throw money at causes, deduct it from their taxes, and skip away.

I recently attended a seminar about Millennials. A major point was that they want to work for companies that “give back.”

That didn't sound true to me, so I looked into this. After further investigation I realized that these young corporate kids love to have that “do-unto-others” responsibility taken off their plates by the company that hires them, and unless they are being sent to Guatemala in the dead of winter to “help” the locals for a week, they aren't really very interested in giving, although they do love to walk and march and show the world how much they care about issues. Wearing bracelets and pins is big, too.

Yes, I am cynical about this replacement of courageous engagement and sacrifice with sentimental feeling toward the obviously “less fortunate.” I will admit that it is probably better than loud and strong lack of empathy, but not much, mainly because it is based on people deceiving themselves about who they are and what they contribute.

(Whew, I am on a rant today!)

So, you keep doing what you do to make a concrete contribution to others.

Here are some suggestions:

Check out the charities at a website like [http://charity.lovetoknow.com/What Percentage of Donations Go to Charity](http://charity.lovetoknow.com/What_Percentage_of_Donations_Go_to_Charity)

This will give you an overview and help you to make a decision.

Please note that some charities have higher administration costs than others because they perform different services. The American Cancer Society does a great job of getting help to those who need it, but they also have to spend money on research, which doesn't seem to be as direct, but is absolutely necessary.

Give directly to a local church or food bank whose work you can see, and hopefully participate in.

Keep giving to the homeless, and, if they are able to understand, talk to them and encourage them to go to a local resource for help. The most important thing with them, mentally ill or not, is to validate their humanity by not ignoring them. And, yes, you do have to use some common sense in dealing with desperate people. Be polite, but be wary if it is a person whose frame of mind you are not familiar with.

I like to leave winter clothes and bed linens in public areas where I know the homeless congregate so there is no delay in getting them what they need. This can also add the delight of finding a treasure to the day of a person with little to smile about. Once in New York, at a very good location on Central Park West, I got invited into the cardboard hut to see how the occupant had put a comforter to use.

Combine any show off charity – those walks and runs do serve to raise awareness – with on-hands or other out-of-pocketbook contributions.

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Practice charity with everyone, not just the desperate. Many of us have things we would love and have the money to buy, but wouldn't dream splurging on ourselves. If you've got it and don't need it, offer it to a friend or acquaintance, even if you perceive them as rich. (You don't really get to decide who has enough money.)

One of the most fun things I do is carry around a bag of my clothing, of which I have too much, and randomly give things to people I run into. I love it when my friends pass on their off casts to me, and figure others like that too. Note: I have run into a few people who think it is insulting, but that can't stop you. Just apologize and move on.

I have a wonderful friend who made a "Random Acts of Kindness" vow for a month and each day she posts the things she does. She isn't showing off; she is inspiring. I am pretty amazed, though, at how many people had never even thought of what she does, even when she isn't posting it for all to see. In the meantime, she is having a wonderful time, buying strangers coffee and paying their tolls if she is in front, as well as serving those who are really in need.

Bottom line: we all need something from others. If you have it, give it. Don't worry about what happens after that. The spirit of charity grows just by being put out into the universe, and, no I am not a hippie.

Know it All

Dear Aunt Bossy,

You seem to have more opinions than you know what to do with. What would be the three most important pieces of advice you would give to everyone?

KIA

Dear KIA,

Well, we all know we can't know it ALL, but this is a start.

1. Nice is more important than smart and pretty.
2. Practice physical and mental health.
3. Expect to be happy.

Let me explain.

"Nice" is not superficial. It doesn't just mean pleasant or complimentary. It means acting with kindness toward others and yourself. It means considering the entire universe your world and treating it well. That is "nice."

Generally eating what you know is good for you and getting enough exercise so that your body works well and supports you in your quest for happiness is how you practice physical health. If you are overweight, sluggish and unhappy with how you move, feel and look, it is most probably because you aren't doing what you should to get the result you want. If you do indeed eat a balanced diet and exercise regularly and are not seeing improvement, check with a reputable doctor.

Practicing mental health means having some sort of spiritual base. Training yourself to think positively and control your moods and find the good that is everywhere is a first step. If that doesn't work, see a reputable doctor.

Don't give into a feeling of entitlement, but do expect to be happy, actively visualize yourself and those around you as happy, and note every instance of joy in your life. If you don't believe it is possible, it isn't.

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If it bothers you that this advice is all very simple but not easy, do not blame me. It is the way of the world.

Aunt Bossy is Susan Murphy, an internationally known Communication Skills Coach who adores spending every winter and spring in Beaufort. Ask for advice at bossymurph@mac.com

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