



Reopening the door to *generosity*

By Yolanda F. Johnson

The pandemic and related lockdown triggered a different kind of generosity compared to other disasters and difficult times in history. As we look forward with cautious hope and optimism, how did this past year change us, and will those changes last?

In living what I refer to as “The Philanthropic Lifestyle,” which truly shows us the beauty of giving back, it’s important to better understand the difference between charity and philanthropy. Charity is giving immediate relief by writing a check or sending cash for a short-term involvement. On the other hand, philanthropy is more of a strategic, long-term commitment to system change work that gets to the root cause of some of the issues facing our society today. Both are great, but I want to encourage you to play the “long game” when it comes to giving back.

During the midst of the pandemic in the United States, charity was at the fore, because many socio-economic issues that had been present for years or even decades seemed new for some. Many people made one-time gifts to different causes and nonprofits, hoping to ease the strain and toll that COVID-19 had taken on so many family, friends, neighbors, and strangers. But for many, the pandemic simply shone a bright light on some of the work that had needed to be done for a

very long time. Here’s hoping that all of the generosity that skyrocketed as a result of the pandemic is here to stay, because people

will always need food, shelter, and medical care. Artists will always need forums to craft and present their talents.

I want to encourage everyone reading this column to take a moment to identify as a philanthropist. Your name doesn’t have to be on a building in order to claim that title. Do what you can; give what you can. A good benchmark to start with is donating 10% of your income. It’s as simple as thinking about what matters the most to you in life. What change do you most want to see in the world? Then think big, of how you might take action on a larger, national, or global scale. Then, think of the folks just down the street, in your neighborhood, at your local gym, at church, wherever. How you might be able to show them a bit of love as well? This is important, because being kind and taking action isn’t just about times of crisis; it should become part of the way we live our lives.

So, as we make our way back into the sunshine of these summer months with vaccination options at our fingertips, we’ll hopefully find opportunities to connect with each other—to hold hands, hug, stand closer than six feet (yay!)—all of the things we haven’t been able to do in more than a year. And may that same spirit of charity that influenced us so much during the most difficult times of the past year remain with us for many years to come. Remember that just because our society is reopening shouldn’t mean that we close the doors to thinking about others and being generous.