



'TIS THE SEASON FOR

Giving Back

By Yolanda F. Johnson

“
It is more blessed to
give than to receive.”

The paraphrase of this line—“It is better to give than to receive”—is actually one of the most famous lines attributed to Jesus, which we hear often in our mainstream modern-day culture. In fact, an article in U.S. News and World Report even stated that physiologically, this is a scientific fact! It really is better for our health and well-being to be generous.

Isn't that the beauty of it all—to embrace the ways we can help others? It doesn't have to be a big or grand gesture. I mean sure, if you can help save part of the rainforest, by all means, do so! But if you can also help facilitate donations to a local shelter or food bank, you're also making an impact.

This column is going to shine a light on some of the many wonderful people out there using their gifts, talents, and resources for the greater good. There is a lot of good work to do, and I am so grateful that I have been allowed a unique opportunity to bring together those who believe in the power of giving back simply because it's a beautiful thing to do.

My give-back journey all began as president of Women In Development (WID), NY, the New York City metro area's 40-year-old premier professional organization for women in fundraising and philanthropic work. I then founded Women of Color in Fundraising and Philanthropy (WOC, pronounced “woke”), to celebrate, champion, and support women of color in these sectors and to provide them with personal and professional development resources.

As the community-building work of WOC has been underway for awhile, it did not take long for our membership to grow to nearly 700 individuals nationwide and internationally. From my experiences and expertise in both fundraising strategy and philanthropic counsel, I recognized the importance of bringing everyone together to maximize our impact. As a result, WOC offers a robust programming schedule, which includes the newly launched WOC Votes 2020 Voter Activation Campaign, in partnership with the League of Women Voters, and PowHer the Vote. We are also planning WOC's first-ever daylong virtual Symposium on November 17. WOC is accomplishing all of

this in addition to providing professional assessments for fundraisers, philanthropists, advisors, and so much more.

It's important for me to build community by tackling issues that are both universal, yet deeply personal, as I have found that most people around us are already fundraisers or philanthropists in some general form, even if it is not their direct profession. Still, many people out there don't even recognize all of the good they're doing. Sometimes, we think it is necessary to have a name like Rockefeller, Carnegie, or Gates to make a real difference. But that's not true! One of the most important goals I have in my work is to dispel that sense of “Impostor Syndrome,” where we feel we don't belong.

Another component of maximizing the impact of good work is understanding the role of allyship. Given the current racial equity movement, I have received a great deal of feedback from non-people of color, asking “What can I do to help?” For this reason, I established the Allies in Action Membership Network (AiA). While its work began before then, AiA was officially launched with a global gathering in July, and is based upon four pillars: Education, Legislation, Inclusion, and Action. We have since delivered a transformative antiracism seminar and continue to move our programming forward.

One of the AiA values about which I am most excited is the “Action” pillar, which includes a philanthropic component of year-end giving. Allies Give 2020 will consist of each ally making a gift of a size that is meaningful to him or her toward causes that champion women and girls of color and racial equity. With this effort, we are truly and directly going to help people in a major way!

As we look ahead to the end of the year and the holidays before us, I urge you to take a moment and ask yourself what gift, resource, or talent might you be able to use to help others. It may be more obvious than usual. Or you may need to think about it a bit. It doesn't have to be the norm; feel free to be creative. Just remember, it only needs to be sincere.

