



## WHY IT MATTERS GENEROSITY HEALS THE GIVER

Imagine a life where you could only receive. Everything you need is **given to you** and **done for you**. You can't contribute, initiate, or engage. How meaningful would this be?

Our deepest human desire is to contribute. We want to matter, to make a difference. If we lose this because we are weakened in some way, we feel the lack. We want to rebalance things again—to have some power to act and give. We never outlive our intrinsic urge to nurture something, to make the world better.

## GENEROSITY HEALS



As a patient, much of this power disappears. You feel what it's like to be dependent. To be the one who doesn't know and cannot do. Even the most capable may be instantly and utterly reduced. So it's not surprising that part of recovery is to give—to look for a way to return gratitude or benefit someone else.

When we as the healthcare team forget that philanthropy begins with the need of patients and families to give as part of their healing, we miss what's most essential. And we may hesitate to invite people to join us—because we mistakenly think it's about **our** needs rather than **their** needs.

Generosity is the ultimate path of meaning and growth. In fact, nothing except altruism has been shown to raise our happiness “set point”—our emotional baseline. Not what we own, not life events, not the achievements we attain.<sup>1</sup> Only generosity. The more value we create for others, the more purpose we see in our own lives.

Generosity even impacts our physical wellbeing. Over 50 medical studies demonstrate the benefits experienced by individuals who extend themselves for others.<sup>2</sup> And in some health systems generosity is considered a therapeutic modality. Patients who give to other patients do better clinically.

This has stunning implications. It means we should never be hesitant to invite people to partner with us. **We're not asking because we're needy. We're asking because people need to give.** It means foundations should not be separate from clinical teams, because giving is part of healing. And it means we should always begin with the donor's life story.

<sup>1</sup> Alex Lickerman. “How to Reset Your Happiness Set Point.” *Psychology Today*. April 21, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Among the people who have described and advanced these studies is Stephen Post, Ph.D., professor of preventive medicine at Stony Brook University School of Medicine and author of numerous books and articles.