

A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding a large quantity of fresh, green pine needles. The needles are vibrant and appear to be from a young tree. A large, white, stylized letter 'G' is superimposed on the left side of the image, partially overlapping the hand and the needles. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting with more foliage.

G

Give Not Until It Hurts, But
Until It Feels Great *Jenny Santi*

Seven years ago,

I stumbled into the unusual career of advising extraordinarily wealthy people on their charitable activities. One of the world's largest private banks hired me to be among their team of in-house philanthropy advisors, and my job exposed me to a world where the clients I met were hundreds of times richer than Madonna. My clients had made enough money—hundreds of millions, even billions—to give in a significant way, often through a formal family foundation or a charitable trust. Week after week, in sunlit skyscraper penthouses, five-star hotel lobbies, and wood-paneled offices that smelled of old money, I met with them privately, listening to the stories of what moved them to do what they do, probing deeply to understand their values and motivations so that I could guide them toward the most appropriate and natural course of action.

Through my work as a philanthropy advisor, I also had a chance to meet and speak privately with so many men and women from the social sector—social entrepreneurs, nonprofit professionals, young students and volunteers from different walks of life. Not everyone had a lot of money to give away. Many were giving their time, their talents, and a big part of their lives to something that mattered deeply to them, and again I was struck by what I observed. Every time they spoke about their work, regardless of how grim the issues they were addressing—whether it was cancer, global warming, or domestic abuse—and even when what they do for a living barely lets them make a living, they beamed with purpose and radiated with something that I can only call joy.

Yet I knew that outside of those private settings, the world is still all too hesitant to embrace the idea that by giving, we indeed receive. We are quick to pass judgment on companies that do good when they reap financial benefits in doing so; we label people as smug when they emerge from a volunteer trip brimming with smiles; we lambast founders of foundations named after themselves. Some generous givers, such as the multi-Grammy-winning singer Michael Bolton, whose namesake charity benefits abused women and children, tell me that they simply do not want to derive any joy from their charitable work. They say it is their duty, and that's it. So many of us have convinced ourselves that giving should be a sacrifice, an act of moral responsibility that renders itself null when we derive any joy from it. But why?

“ I was struck by what I observed. Every time they spoke about their work, regardless of how grim the issues they were addressing—whether it was cancer, global warming, or domestic abuse—and even when what they do for a living barely lets them make a living, they beamed with purpose and radiated with something that I can only call joy.

And so those beautiful, heartwarming stories that people have told me over the years remained unheard, except by a few people like me. Deeply personal stories of finding love, of recovering from an unhappy childhood, of repairing family bonds, of breaking through the cycle of grief, of finding a calling and not just a job, and of finding fulfillment beyond material wealth.

But in a “lightbulb flashing moment” when I was in a strictly private philanthropy conference in Beijing in 2012, it occurred to me that these stories should not be kept a secret. It occurred to me that these stories of the life-changing power of giving deserve to be told on a massive scale. Why? Because they hold the power to inspire others to do the same, and to experience in a whole new way the joy of giving.

My dream is to create a shift in consciousness about giving, from something that we perceive to be drudgery and a grinding moral obligation, to something that we want to do because it gives us fulfillment, meaning, and happiness in life. I wanted to live in a world where we no longer need to be coerced, pressured, or guilt-tripped into making a difference, but where we intuitively understand that it is good to give. A world not where we give until it hurts, but where we give until it feels great. I decided to write a book that told the stories that would lead us there.

The hardest part about this project was that I wasn't simply asking people to tell me about what their charitable work did to change the world. Everyone likes to talk about that the schools they built, the kids whose lives they have transformed for the better, the sick they have cured, the blind to whom they have given sight, the homes they have rebuilt from rubble. The hardest part was that I was asking people to tell me what their own acts of giving did to change their lives. I made a mental list of all the reasons they could possibly say no: I don't want to appear smug and talk about how giving brought me joy! The questions you ask are very personal. How self-serving it is to talk about what my charitable work has done for me!

I knew that if I could get even just two or three people to catalyze this movement, that I would get somewhere. And so began my journey when I approached three of the most famous and inspiring people I knew, and sent each of them a carefully-worded email asking if they would be willing to publicly share their personal story of giving. To my surprise, all three gladly said yes. So I then approached a team of researchers who were studying the link between giving and happiness, and found out that they too were very willing to share with me their latest findings. Day by day, my project was growing. One by one, I approached many other philanthropists and celebrity activists and asked if they would like to join the ranks of the people who have shared their stories on the transformative power of giving upon the self.

It was not my intention to write a book about celebrity giving, but I knew that if some of our favorite personalities and household names were happy to share their stories about finding joy in giving, it would be easier to get others to do the same.

Sometime around the fifth month, as if by magic, people started suggesting names of others I should be featuring in the book, instead of me making the request. And to my surprise, even people who I've been told are obsessively private agreed to be interviewed. One of them was Ray Chambers ("the greatest philanthropist no one has ever heard of"), who prefers to work behind the scenes and is said to have paid people a lot of money to keep his name out of the press. I was touched when Ray said of this project:

"What really appeals to me about your pursuit is how it could lead to the aggregation of hundreds of millions of people feeling that way, recognizing what giving can do for the self. And then, can we dare to hope, that with the spreading of that knowledge, we begin to see a shift."

I tell him that is precisely what I hope to achieve.

“ My dream is to create a shift in consciousness about giving ...

After almost three years on this journey, I have now gathered so many stories on how giving to others—be it money, expertise, time, or love—has helped people from all walks of life find purpose and joy. I've seen this again and again through the eyes of celebrities and change agents, billionaires and blue collar workers, superstars and quietly tenacious back-stagers, people of all ages who've made giving their lifestyle and families for whom the act of giving goes on through the generations.

A 5-year old boy told me that helping the homeless was his purpose. An Oscar-winning actress shared with me that working on her foundation has been “the most exciting ride” of her entire life. Nonprofit professionals who supposedly “gave it all up” to make a difference, and regularly find themselves in conditions that would appall the rest of us—told me why they feel so fundamentally fulfilled and free of angst. People facing the greatest challenges of their lives—the death of a loved one, a troubled childhood, a debilitating illness, or collective grief—have found renewed hope by devoting their time and efforts towards something other than themselves. A bestselling author whose daughter died from a rare disease found strength again after starting a foundation in her daughter's name. A media magnate set up a family foundation to bring his children closer to him and to one another. And by helping other victims' families, a couple whose son perished on 9-11 coped with their grief and learned to smile again.

Here are some of the greatest lessons I learned through the stories that I heard:

- **It's true that giving can hurt.** We might feel depleted, exhausted, taken advantage of or simply annoyed when we give in the wrong way. If our hearts aren't fully into it, we are very likely to get bored, distracted, and apathetic. We are also very likely to give up when the going gets tough—and things will get tough. Giving doesn't feel good when the way we give is not matched to our passion.
- **Our passion should be the foundation for our giving.** It is not how much we give, but how much love we put into giving and how much we love what we are giving to. Giving should be personal. It's only natural that we care about this and not so much about that, and that's okay. It should not be simply a matter of choosing the right thing, but also a matter of choosing what is right for us. When I asked Goldie Hawn what advice she can give to others who want to make a difference, she said, "First of all, find out what you care about, who you care about, what matters to you, what is your passion, how do you want to see change. When you truly look at these things outside of yourself, then you may find your charity, your time, your volunteer period. Find out what it is—is it with children? Is it with hospitals? Find out."

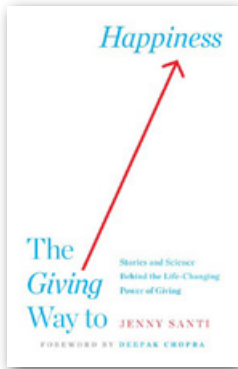
- **To identify your passion, ask yourself these questions:** What experiences have shaped your life? When you were in school, what did you most enjoy studying? What is your greatest accomplishment and your greatest loss? What keeps you awake at night? What brings you to tears? What makes you angry? What moves you?
- **Giving is by no means limited to gifts of money.** The gift of time is sometimes even more valuable to the receiver, and more satisfying for the giver. We don't all have the same amount of money, but we all do have time on our hands, and can give some of this time to help others, whether that means we devote our lifetimes to service, or just give a few hours each day or a few days a year.
- **Give with more focus and intention.** When we choose where and how to give, the choice is difficult because we are choosing between good and good. But we can't fund every single cause out there. There are thousands of worthy charities, and we should not feel bad about taking our time in choosing where we'd like to give, how much, and how. Many generous people prefer to give in different ways, knowing that some donations have more impact than others. It helps to do things more purposefully.

→ **We should do something that makes a real impact—and see it for ourselves.**

The greatest reward is often said to be the impact one has on an issue. This is why it's better to give while we are alive, rather than waiting for people to do things on our behalf once we have gone. If we don't have a strong sense that the things we have invested in are making a difference, that can leave us frustrated, angry, disappointed. We might just walk away. All of us are looking for a sense of confidence that we are actually making a difference. We all want to know that what we are doing is yielding meaningful results.

The key is to find the approach that fits you. When you do, then the more you give, the more you stand to get back. **If you give from an authentic place, you get more than you give, and you'll keep on giving because you know it feels great.** 📖

Info



BUY THE BOOK | Get more details or buy a copy of [The Giving Way to Happiness](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR | Jenny Santi was born and raised in Manila in the Philippines, and now splits her time between Singapore and New York. She holds an MBA from INSEAD and Wharton Business School and attended New York University's Heyman Center for Philanthropy and Fundraising, where she is a chartered advisor in philanthropy. Santi is a philanthropy adviser to some of the world's wealthiest philanthropists, and for five years, was the head of Philanthropy Services (Southeast Asia) for the world's largest wealth manager. She is a frequent commentator on the topic of philanthropy and has been quoted in the *International Herald Tribune*, on Channel NewsAsia, and on BBC World News.

→ **SEND THIS** | [Pass along a copy](#) of this manifesto to others.

→ **SUBSCRIBE** | [Sign up for e-news](#) to learn when our latest manifestos are available.

This document was created on October 14, 2015 and is based on the best information available at that time. The copyright of this work belongs to the author, who is solely responsible for the content. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs License. To view a copy of this license, visit [Creative Commons](#) or send a letter to Creative Commons, 559 Nathan Abbott Way, Stanford, California 94305, USA. Cover image from [Unsplash](#). You are given the unlimited right to print this manifesto and to distribute it electronically (via email, your website, or any other means). You can print out pages and put them in your favorite coffee shop's windows or your doctor's waiting room. You can transcribe the author's words onto the sidewalk, or you can hand out copies to everyone you meet. You may not alter this manifesto in any way, though, and you may not charge for it.

About ChangeThis

[ChangeThis](#) is a vehicle, not a publisher. We make it easy for big ideas to spread. While the authors we work with are responsible for their own work, they don't necessarily agree with everything available in ChangeThis format. But you knew that already.

800ceoread

ChangeThis is supported by the love and tender care of 800-CEO-READ. Visit us at [800-CEO-READ](#) or at our daily [blog](#).