

Generosity

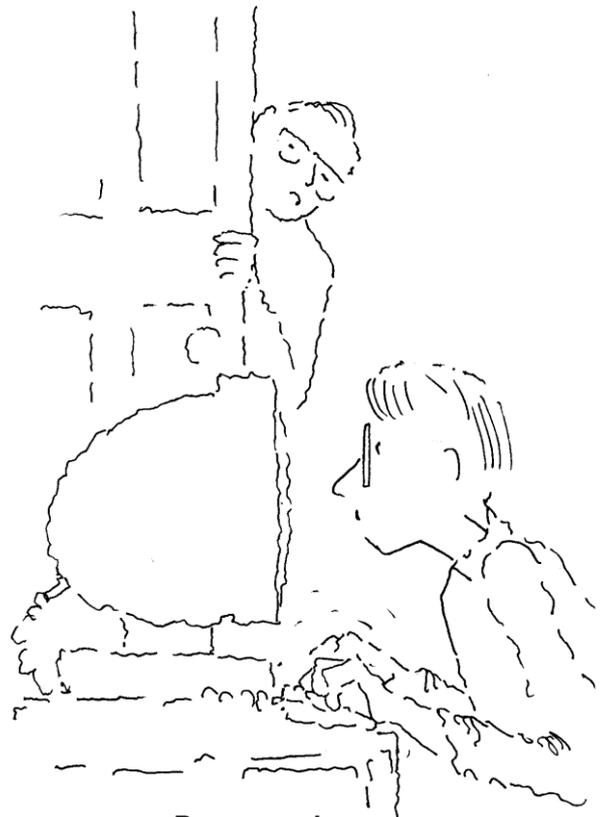
The virtue that builds relationships

The virtue of generosity lays the foundation for the self-giving which must underpin loving relationships. As do the other virtues, it assists with self-management, with a specific role of perfecting the will. It is the habit of choosing compassionate and respectful behaviours attuned to the needs of others, and empowering us to love. Without generosity, relationships and friendships become self-serving. Generosity is the virtue of 'a good heart'.

Generosity is the proper habit of the human faculty of choice, our will. If freedom does not lead eventually to love it has been squandered. Every choice we make is either egocentric or us/other-centred. Habitually self-centred choices strangle relationships.

David Isaacs describes generosity in the following way, *'Generous people act unselfishly and cheerfully for the benefit of others, conscious of the value of their help and despite the fact that it may cost them an effort.'* He teaches passionately about the role of generosity and service to others in solving many teenage problems, and insists, *'Your child must experience the joy that comes from serving others'*. He argues that the antidote to the introspection, the self-centredness, and the selfish material goals, that can take over in teenage years is education in generosity.

Aristotle said that one feature of adolescence is idealism... generosity in the service of great causes. We must nourish this quality in the adolescents in our care. One older daughter grasped this intuitively when she advised her father who was having a tough time managing two teenage sons, *'Dad, just get them doing things for others; they'll be fine'*. The virtue of generosity prepares young people to do much good in their adult lives modeling their lives on the one who *'went about doing good'*.



**Programming,
programming,
programming!**

**How about thinking of People
for a change, Bill?**

Teaching generosity



Teach by example. Parents model this secret ingredient of loving relationships when they help each other cheerfully not from obligation, and when they habitually make light of impositions on their own time and energy. One wedding celebrant urged the newly-weds with great affection, *'It's a matter of giving until you don't know if there will be anything left for yourself!'*



Teach by advice, suggesting ways to help others.



Debrief when a child falls short, teaching the child to look at the causes of its own behaviour, and at the effect it has on others. A good rule of thumb for parents is to 'Go for the heart', explaining how uncharitable behaviour impacts on others.



Have high expectations, giving children small well-chosen jobs, and helping the child to see that each job is a way of helping others. Work side by side with children to teach them responsibility.



Teach generosity and kindness within the family. Refine a generous home culture of smiling service to each other, of hopping in to offer assistance, of taking over when someone is tired, of considerate phone calls when held up, and of keeping in touch during the day when there is an imponderable dilemma to negotiate.



Teach generosity by teaching detachment: Teach that happiness is in relationships not in things, and that loving relationships require self-giving. Parents mar the growth of generosity when they talk too much about their own gadgets and purchases, and when they spoil children. It is not enough that children earn their money, parents must succeed in fostering habits of detachment by living in their own lives the principle: *'We use things but we don't put our hearts in them.'* Obviously it is best to avoid expensive presents creating the illusion that the more one possesses, the happier one becomes. The aim is to teach children to make use of money and material possessions to do good for those they love, and for those in need.



Teach generosity by fostering solidarity with those who are less fortunate. This is a timeless necessity. Cicero wrote, *'Men were brought into existence for the sake of others, that they might do one another good.'* Seneca appealed, *'Attend to any poor wretch as your fellow man.'* Think of the line from Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet*, *'You give but little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.'* Talk about ideals around the dinner table and then walk the walk. Work with your child in the service of others: mowing the elderly neighbour's lawn, visiting grandparents more often, dropping everything to visit a friend who has suffered a misfortune, etc.

Source: Institute of Advanced Family Studies, Internatinonal University of Catalonia.
e-MEF program. <http://www.uic.es/en/marriage-education-family>