

Giving the gift of your time has lasting benefits

By *Helene Stoller*
CONTRIBUTOR

As the holidays approach, we are likely to be thinking, "What can I get for ..." about the various people who touch our lives on a regular basis.

And the same old list of nice but potentially unnecessary things comes to our minds: a sweater for a favorite aunt, writing paper and stamps for grandma, jewelry for that special woman and the latest electronic entertainment device or game for a child.

The list of things goes on and on, and the cost of these gifts goes up and up.

For many of us in these tough economic times, giving material gifts might just not be affordable. I'd like to suggest that, whether we can afford material gifts or not, we might want to consider an alternative or addition for gift-giving this holiday season.



In the true spirit of giving, I suggest that we give the gift of ourselves, our time and our love for those who are meaningful in our lives. Instead of (or in addition to) a sweater for an elderly relative, you could give her five gift certificates for outings or shopping trips with you, at the time of her choice. Your involvement with her during the course of the year will, I suspect, bring her more pleasure than a material gift ever could.

SELF HELP

A man could offer his mate the gift of 10 "honey-do" items of her choice done without complaint or grumbling at the time of her choice in addition to a gift certificate for a romantic weekend at a bed-and-breakfast.

Parents could give their children the priceless gift of time together — gift certificates for 10 family afternoons or evenings doing outdoor activities of each child's choice (e.g., playing catch, swimming, bike riding, rollerblading) and similar gift certificates for indoor activities with one or more family members (e.g., playing a board game, playing dress-up, drawing, painting, reading aloud).

These gift certificates show thought and caring about the people who matter most to us, cost us nothing but enrich us and our relationships. The non-material ways in which one person can use his or her time to please another person are endless, and the joy that both giver and

receiver obtain from this kind of giving is likely to sustain and enhance relationships throughout the year.

Rather than clutter the planet and our homes with more things that we don't need and rarely use, let's this year choose and give gifts that are likely to matter more and have longer-term benefit, both financially and interpersonally — the gift of ourselves, our time, and our love.

For those readers who try this approach to gift-giving this year, I'd appreciate hearing from you about your experience at helene.stoller@gmail.com. And in the spirit of giving of oneself, I will commit to giving free half-hour consultation sessions to five people who describe positive gift-giving experiences using these ideas and requesting a personal consultation.

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