

## The Joys of Giving Large

by Brad Hurley

Jeff Kaufman and Julia Wise are a young couple living in Boston. Jeff is a software engineer at Google and Julia is a social worker. For the past few years they've been giving away nearly 60 percent of their after-tax income to charities working to reduce poverty and save lives in developing countries. Despite a combined income well into the six figures, they spend little more than \$15,000/year on themselves. Since 2008 they've given away more than \$250,000.

That's a lot of money, and it sounds like a big sacrifice. But they insist that it isn't. In her blog, Julia writes, "The things we love most--spending time with family and friends, making music, dancing, cooking, reading--are all things we can do on a small budget. If we gave less, we would spend more on ourselves but probably wouldn't be noticeably happier." She says that giving is one of the most important things in her life, and she does it because she believes that "people--all people, even far-away people--should not have to suffer and die needlessly."

I share that belief. My giving is a drop in the bucket compared with that of Jeff and Julia, but still I managed to donate about 11 percent of my income last year, the majority of it to charities working to save or improve lives in developing countries. And I plan to give more.

What I've found is that giving large is different. When you make a significant donation, there's a sense of contributing to a mission, of making a tangible impact, of feeling like you count. You don't have to give a lot to make a difference: it only costs about 30 U.S. cents to deworm a child in India or Kenya, for example, and the cost to purchase and distribute an anti-malarial bed net in Malawi or the Democratic Republic of Congo ranges from about \$5 to \$7.50. But if you can afford to scale up those numbers by giving more, you can help improve the lives of hundreds or even thousands of people. Use the [Life You Can Save's](#) Charity Impact Calculator to see how many people you could help with a given donation.

When I first decided to start giving larger, my philosophy was "give til it hurts." But I look at it differently now. Over the past decade I've made an effort to examine my possessions, my habits, and my lifestyle with a goal of eliminating what I don't need or what doesn't bring me happiness. The result is that most things I own or do in my life are there because I deliberately chose to keep them (or keep doing them). That makes me happy, which in turn reduces the urge to buy more and more stuff, because I'm satisfied with what I have. I can give more, because I desire less.

When you apply this process to all aspects of your life, it moves you toward what Julia Wise described above: you discover that you don't need to spend a lot of money to

find happiness and pleasure. Even on a modest income you may find that you have money left over for giving without feeling like you've made a sacrifice. The philosopher Toby Ord did something like this when he figured out how much money he would need each year to fund a simple but comfortable lifestyle, and then publicly pledged to give everything he earned above that amount to effective charities every year for the rest of his working life.

Not everyone can afford to give large: you either need to earn a comfortable income or find ways to live well below your means. Those options aren't available to all of us. But as Julia Wise writes, "You don't have to be rich to be generous. It might be easier for people with heaps of money, but those of us who have to think about rent and groceries can still do a lot. My grandmother donated 10 percent of her income for as long as she controlled her own money, even when she was living off social security checks."

For me, it boils down to this: There are plenty of other things I could do with the money I give away to effective charities each year. But can I think of anything better to do with it? No. It feels like the best possible use of my money. I'm a lot happier giving large than living large.