Drunk Tank Pink: Communities are better when individuals are generous

Communities in Control Conference: "Think Differently"
Melbourne, 25 May, 2015

Presentation by

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Thanks very much for that incredibly generous introduction.

I'm going to talk to you today about some ideas that I've had - about generosity and about how we can encourage communities and people in communities to behave more generously.

This is something that's interested me for the past, I'd say probably 10 or 15 years and my interest began when I was undergrad at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, and I became interested in how we could encourage small acts of generosity.

I'm not talking about gigantic acts of philanthropy, like funding a hospital with $100million, or funding a library, or funding a school. I'm not talking about big acts like that, I'm talking about the small acts of generosity that shape a community, but make it a healthier, happier, better place to live.

I'm talking about things like: blood donation, becoming an organ donor, and picking up your kids on time from day care – which is surprisingly challenging and I'll talk about that briefly later on; funding non-profits: we heard a lot about that in the last session.

Generally just being charitable and giving even small amounts to charitable causes.

I want to talk about that, but I want to first start by talking about how I came to be interested in this.

So as I said, 15 years ago I was an undergrad at the University of New South Wales and I was talking an 'Introduction to Psychology' class.

I had no idea what I was going to do with my life, and as I started taking this course, I learned about some experiments that fascinated me, and at the same time, the *Sydney Morning Herald* released a list of the 10 best psychology

studies of all time, the most important ones. They were talking about which ones had the biggest impact on how we live our lives and one of them in the top three was by a man named 'John Darley'.

John got his PhD in Social Psychology at Harvard in 1965. When he was a young professor – he started his career at New York University which is where I am – so he moved to New York and unfortunately a couple of months after he moved, there was a terrible crime committed.

A woman was assaulted in view of dozens of people and they did nothing. It was a real tragedy, some of you might have heard of this. Her name was 'Kitty Genovese' and it's a very famous, famous crime in New York.

John was fascinated by this because the *New York Times* picked up on this and they said 'There's obviously something rotten in New York. There's something wrong with New Yorkers. There's something fundamentally wrong with this community, and there's an absence of generosity generally, and it's probably something that's just been ingrained in these people because they've lived in this community for too long.

Now John was a Social Psychologist and what social psychologists do is they say, 'there's never a blanket cause like that, what's really going on is there's something about the situation that's shaping how people are behaving'.

So what he and his colleagues did, was they ran a number of studies and they wanted to try and work out what was it about this situation that led no one to help poor Kitty Genovese as she was being assaulted?

The first thing he did was that he showed people this slide – I'm going to get out of the way here – and he said to them: 'Imagine two situations: we've got 'Situation A' where there are a whole lot of people witnessing some emergency – and it's pretty clear from this that it's an emergency – you can either have a

whole lot of people as in this case, or you could have one person in the bottom case – and he said to them: 'If you had to guess who is going to be more helpful, where will you get the most assistance?' when you have lots of people as in the top case, or when you have just one person as in the bottom case?

Response:

One.

Professor Adam Alter

One. That's right. You all know the answer. None of the people here interviewed knew the answer.

They said things like if you have a lot of people, it doesn't matter if a couple don't help, because other people will pick up the slack and at the same time, you'll have safety in numbers, you know, to intervene in an emergency is asking a lot of people; they often fear for their own lives.

Even phoning the police, it feels somehow safer to have other people around to back you up, to back up what's going on; and of course, as you all know, that's not true at all. It's much better to have just one person witnessing an emergency because if there are many people, there's great diffusion of responsibility. People end up not helping because they feel that other people will be generous and they don't need to.

So if you ever send emails asking people favours, take the extra time to send the same email personally addressed to each recipient. You will have hundreds of people helping whereas if you send that same email to all hundred in one go, it's just not going to do anything, they're not going to help.

Anyway this is John's big insight. He basically was the father of 'bystander apathy', the idea that many people don't help much, and I became fascinated by this. So fascinated in fact, that I applied to work with John at Princeton.

So here we have the one person who's much more helpful than the many. I moved to Princeton in 2004, about 11 years ago, and I started studying under John – there he is – and I did a PhD in Social Psychology much like he had done at Harvard in 1965.

I was very curious about this idea that many people are not very helpful, and partly, I was curious because all of you are interested in community, so was I. The idea that we have communities that are growing in size – we have greater density in our urban centres than ever before – is really troubling if you know that as the communities get more and more dense, people are going to become less and less helpful.

That's obviously a real problem for big communities, especially as the world becomes more urbanised.

John told me about a number of really interesting studies. One of them he told me about was this study known as the 'Lost Letter Study'. It's a very very influential study in the world of social psychology, and it began in the 1970's.

What happened was that psychologists went to a whole lot of communities around the US, either where students were living, or where wealthy people were living, or where poorer people were living and what they did was at various points in these communities, they dropped letters.

They dropped letters but the letters had addresses on them, so it was totally clear where the letters were supposed to go. It looked like someone had absentmindedly dropped the letter and your choice as a member of this community as you stumble on this letter, is to decide whether you're going to

mail the letter. Whether you're going to help out; whether you're going to do the generous thing, or whether you're not going to do the generous thing.

The results were pretty striking: it didn't matter which community they were in, whether it was older people, younger people, wealthy people, poor people, diverse communities: if population density was higher, fewer of the letters were mailed. This is sort of the 'bystander apathy' idea writ large, that when there are too many people in a community, no one does anything and they found this in many, many contexts.

I did a study last year looking at philanthropy and population density – this is in the United States, and I'm doing a similar study in Australia now, I'm just as curious about patterns of giving here – but what you find is the way the US is set up is much like Australia.

You have a couple of areas that are very densely populated: in the north-east you've got Philadelphia, New York, Boston; on the west coast here you've got LA and San Diego, and then San Francisco and you've got a couple of other centres in the mid-west that are also very densely populated, and what I found was those areas, those big dense urban areas, are the ones where people donate less per dollar earned to charitable causes.

Basically this density is leaching their generosity and this is a massive, massive challenge because more and more people are moving to these sorts of areas. So I've devoted a lot of my energy to trying to understand how we can improve generosity in these centres where there are so many people – and they're growing and they're becoming more densely populated; and I want to share some of those ideas with you today.

So the question really is: how do we bring generosity back? How do we herald a new era, a renaissance of generosity in these very big, densely populated urban areas?

I am going to suggest that the answer comes from psychology and behavioural science.

If we can understand how people think, feel, and behave using experiments and using all sorts of clever techniques which I'll share with you today, we have a much better ability to generate more generosity in these communities, even as they become more densely populated.

The key insight here is you have to make people feel like although there are lots of other people around, everything rests on them. They have to act as the one person who can help.

So we basically want to turn people who live in this sort of situation into people who feel like they are in this situation where there's just one of them.

I want to start by illustrating an example of how we can engender this sort of generosity with a quick demonstration.

Here you can see - we've got the letters of the Roman alphabet and what I'd like you to do, is something you've probably never been asked to do before: I'd like you to look at the letters and I'd like you to decide which three are your favourites.

It's a weird question, but just take a second and think about which three letters are your favourite. Now what I want you to do is, I want you to tell me if at least one of those letters is the first letter in your first name, middle name or last name.

Okay so almost all the hands in the room are up, not all of them, but the vast majority. That means that you like: (a) yourself, which is good; and it also means that you like your name. It's known as 'implicit egotism,' that's basically what people call it.

So a sort of long and fancy way of saying 'we can show you how much you like yourself by asking a question like this.'

It's a way of expressing our own liking of ourselves, and it's a very powerful idea. Now obviously this is just a simple demonstration, but it has massive implications for generosity if you think about it.

I want to share with you some studies that were done to show exactly that.

So we name ourselves, we name our businesses, we name our organisations, we name our non-profits; we also name storms: we had Cyclone Tracey in Darwin.

Now you might think Cyclone Tracey could have been named any other cyclone, it could have been given any other name, but I'm going to suggest that the way really matters, and I'm going to focus on a couple of the very worst storms in American history.

Just after I arrived in the country, Hurricane Katrina destroyed much of New Orleans. Here we have Katrina and Rita, and remember that when I asked you to pick your favourite initials – your favourite letters – you were drawn to the ones that reminded you of yourselves, and that actually matters when it comes to naming hurricanes because when a hurricane does a lot of damage, one of the things we try to do is to extract aid from people, to encourage them to be generous and it's obviously critical because people need to rebuild their lives.

When you have a hurricane as damaging as Katrina, aid really matters and people did give very generously, but what's fascinating about this naming approach, is that it changes how much people give, depending on their initials, so what you find is – there's research showing that – people whose names begin with a 'K' give more, give two and a half times more to 'Katrina' than to any other hurricane that year, in that 2005 Atlantic season.

Rita was also very damaging in that season. People with 'R' names gave 3.6 times more to Rita than to any other hurricane.

So we've got this staggering tendency for people to be more generous to hurricanes that weirdly remind them of themselves.

Maybe they feel a little bit more responsible, we don't know exactly what's going on, but something is driving greater generosity towards the people who've suffered under these hurricanes that happen to have shared their initials.

Now the reason why this is such a useful piece of information is because the way we name hurricanes today; the way the weather service names them all over the world, including in Australia, is to go down an alphabetical list.

You've probably seen this (referring to PowerPoint presentation), that the first ones are named 'A', 'B' and then 'C' and then 'D', and we just progress down a list.

Now that seems like as good a way as any to name hurricanes, we don't want to pick on any one person in particular, and it turns out that that's not really a great idea. The reason is, if you look at the population – this is true in both Australia and the US – you can represent how common first names and are last names are with each initial, and I'm going to show you by changing the size of these letters.

The most common ones will be large and the least common ones will be small. We have a lot of 'J' names, a lot of 'M' names. 'J' names are particularly common among men: we've got 'James' and 'John's' and 'Jack's' and 'Jason's' and 'Jim's' and so on.

‘M’s we’ve got a lot of ‘M’ names for women: we’ve got ‘Michelle’s’ and ‘Mary’s’ and ‘Marie’s’ and so on; so we’ve got a lot of names that begin with ‘J’ and ‘M’.

Now if we know if people give more to hurricanes that happen to share their initials, then picking a hurricane with the letter ‘O’ leaves a lot of money on the table, and since this is a really noble cause, we want to encourage people to give as much as possible, so just simply running down the alphabet shows a lack of psychological insight.

By understanding this fact, we can generate much more generosity by encouraging people to give to those hurricanes that happen to share their initials.

I want to show you how that works: you can see here I’m going to depict the boost for each name in each of the hurricanes this year.

These are some of the names, they’re going to start with: Anna, Bill and Claudette, and Danny and so on, and you can see here this is how much of a boost you’re going to get because there are either more or fewer people in the population who share those initials.

Odette doesn’t even seem to be coming up on the map, not much of a boost there. If Odette happens to be the most damaging hurricane in the Atlantic Basin this year, there’s not going to be a whole lot of generosity there and that’s obviously a problem.

If Hurricane Joaquin with a ‘J’ is the main hurricane in the United States, that’s actually going to be – I mean we hope there’ll be no damaging hurricanes, but if there is one, we’ll be able to extract far more aid from people without even having to do anything fancy or spending a lot of money, or engendering some special cause.

All you have to do is appeal to what matters most to them, which is themselves.

Just remind them of themselves when you name the hurricane, it's an incredibly powerful idea.

I'm going to show you some other examples of how we can use this idea that by making people feel more special, by making the cause a reflection of themselves, you can encourage greater generosity.

Make them feel less like one in a huge crowd, and more like an individual.

Some of you may have done this before: we heard a little bit about the digital divide earlier, I may have done this occasionally where you search for your own name, you Google yourself, just out of curiosity to see if there's anyone else in the world who might share your name.

Some of you might have many namesakes, some of you might not have that many. I know of five others in the US: I'm on the end there; this guy I actually met a few years ago, he's exactly like me only he's 6 foot 6 and very, very strong – he's a line backer for a football team.

This guy over here is a sports broadcaster, he has my dream job. These are also people named Adam Alter and what's really interesting about finding out that there's someone who shares your name, especially when it's pretty unusual, is what a powerful experience that is; how much that bonds you to that person.

Like finding out that someone shares your name is a very unusual event, but it really makes you feel close to them, much closer than you do to just any random person you haven't met before.

This is also a powerful insight because if our initials make us feel closer to the cause, you can imagine how sharing a full name makes you feel closer to someone else.

I did an experiment on this when I was at Princeton – this was also while I was working with John – what we did was we told people: 'Welcome to the Psychology Department at Princeton' – they had all come in to do a short experiment – we said to them, 'This is a map of a conference room and you're going to be sitting with some other students' – these are all students – 'and you're going to be discussing various issues later on.

Issues like: grade inflation – in the US we give everyone an 'A' because it makes all of them happy, so we wanted them to discuss whether that was a good policy or not, that's an exaggeration, but it's an issue.

So we have this map here and they had to select which chair they wanted to sit on.

Now for some of them – imagine the person's name is 'Adam' for a second – for some of them we said: 'Okay there's someone who's already picked this chair over here, this person's Paul, he's born on December 16th. This person over here is James, born on May 16th."

We just picked random names that had nothing to do with their own name, they didn't share initials, they didn't share names or anything special – and then we said to them: 'Why don't you pick somewhere where you'd like to sit?' so that's for some of them. Those people, as you might imagine, were pretty indifferent, they didn't care about sitting either near Paul or James, and most of them didn't want a crowd either Paul or James, so they sat somewhere in the middle, and the average was right here between two and three.

Right in the middle of the room so they didn't feel any particular closeness to either of those people which makes sense. For other people, we found out their names and birthdays ahead of time – we were very sneaky about that – and we

said to them: 'Oh it turns out the person whose sitting on this seat turns out to have either the same name, or the same birthday, or the same of both, just randomly.

When the person shared the same name, on average they chose to sit over here, they wanted to sit much closer to this person, which makes a lot of sense right, you feel that closeness to the person.

You're curious, you want to find out more about them. Something about sharing the name with them makes you feel closer to them, you want to be physically closer as well.

When you ask these people 'Why did you pick seat 1 or 2?' they don't say 'Because I wanted to sit next to this person who shared my name,' they make something up like 'I always feel more comfortable on the left side of the room.' They have all sorts of strange, fabricated reasons for that.

Now again, this is sort of an interesting basic idea, that people sit closer to others who share their names, but it's a very powerful one and you can again, use this to great effect. I want to show you how you might do that.

This is some research I did earlier this year with an organisation known as 'Donors Choose'. Does anyone know this organisation, has anyone heard of them? I don't think they're particularly well known in Australia, but they're a crowd funding plat form for public school teachers.

In America, public school teachers don't have a lot of funding, and they obviously want to teach kids and they want to do it in a way that's vivid and interesting, that captures the imagination of these students, but they don't have much money to do that.

What happens is if you're a public school teacher, let's say you want to help a student build a replica of a famous ship, you're going to need a little bit of wood

and glue, and some textas and some paint and a few other things. That's going to cost money.

What you do is you go to Donors Choose, you post your project and then any one of us could then fund that project. If we think it's worthwhile, we will fund it.

We'll basically give money and if there's enough money they'll be able to go ahead and push that project through. You get wonderful pictures in the mail showing the students happily holding up the replica of the ship, and it's a great idea.

But as you can imagine a lot struggle to get funding. So I ran an experiment with the people at Donors Choose. Now this is an absolutely colossal organisation, it's huge. They have millions and millions of people on their emailing list which is a great way to run experiments.

What we did was on Valentine's Day this year, we sent out some emails. Now let's imagine the emails are going to 'Rita Minton', one of the people who in the past has become part of this Donors Choose database.

We had two different versions of our email. The first version was the non-matching name version, so this is something like what it looked like. It said: "Dear Rita, Roses are red, violets are blue; we heart this teacher and hope you do too. Give today to the classroom of Mrs Watson, a teacher in New York, New York."

Now Mrs Watson has no relationship to Rita Minton. There's no linking of the name in any way, so that's why that's the non-matching name condition.

There's a cutesy poem attached to it, but the other half of the people got this email – the matching-name email: "Dear Rita, Roses are red, violets are blue;

Give to a teacher with the same name as you. Give today to the classroom of Mrs Minton, a teacher in New York, New York."

Because they're a large organisation with so many teachers and so many donors, they were able to find a lot of people who shared names, and often, very unusual names.

So what happened was: people got one of these two emails and they wanted to see whether people would be more generous towards a teacher who happened to share their initial in the same way that people give more to hurricanes that remind them of themselves.

This is what they found, the results were absolutely staggering and this shows you how this connection, engendering a connection in a sea of millions of potential donors and millions of potential teachers – or hundreds of thousands of potential teachers – they really wanted to show that this closeness would drive giving.

So these are the only differences, just these small differences in the email, you saw some of the responses when people gave, Lori from Texas said: "I'm choosing to give to you because you have the same last name as the one I have, and I also taught in a small Texas district in a high poverty area for 20 years in Special Ed. Differentiated instruction is a must. Keep up the good work." Here's another one, Karen Hickey from Jersey said: "Because I am a Mrs Hickey too" she would give.

Then there was a lot of the same sort of thing Twitter, so Jason French said: "Just receive a Donors Choose email to help Mrs French's class. Well played. Done and done." Bryan Fanning: "Well played Donors Choose, you have my attention. Interested to see if this results in a bump in giving.

And the results, as I said, were pretty staggering. So remember we have the non-matching version: half of them got this; and then we have the matching version: the other half got this one.

And this is what you see, these are the results: for every thousand emails sent, the donations amounted to $10.00 in the non-matching name condition; in the matching name condition, $80.00 for every thousand emails. In other words in increase of eight times which is a dramatic increase.

It's very hard to get people to be one or two or three or four per cent more generous, and here we're talking about an increase of eight times which is huge.

Here's another example: if you look at how much they received per email opened, it was five cents in the non-matching name condition; 51 cents in the matching name condition.

Again more than ten times more. It's a massive, massive increase.

The average donation size was also greater, so it's not just that more people gave, but that the amount was much greater. Instead of $23.83, in the matching name condition, that amount was more than three times higher: about $85.00.

The best thing of all, and this shows just how powerful this intervention is, is that they classified donors according to whether they've given recently. Some donors are classified as 'current' and some are classified as 'lapsed'. If you haven't given to a cause on the site for more than a year, you're a 'lapsed' donor.

If any of you have worked in non-profits or in charities, you know that it's incredibly hard to get people who have lapsed, to come back into the fold, to give again.

Yet what they found was that 44% of all donors in the matching name condition were people who hadn't given for over a year. These were people who had sort of escaped the net, and yet they were coming back and being generous because they felt this incredible connection to the teacher who happened to share their name.

It's a very, very powerful intervention, a very powerful idea.

So what you can see from all of this, is this making people feel like there's some personal connection is the road to generosity basically. It's a very, very powerful idea.

We often think that people are going to behave according to things like how much money we give them: if you give people more money they'll be more generous; if you want to discourage a lack of generosity, you punish people. That sort of thing.

I want to show you a couple of other examples that show that if we understand what drives people with behavioural science, we're much better placed to encourage the right sorts of generous behaviour.

This is a study that was done in Israel at day care centres, and what happened at the day care centres – as I mentioned earlier, we try to encourage people to come and collect their kids on time, and that doesn't always happen, you know, work's running a little bit late, but that puts a huge strain on the people who work at these day care centres.

What happened in Israel is that they decided they wanted to try a little intervention to see if they could change how many people came late.

So they introduced a small punishment for the people who were picking their kids up late, the parents who were coming late.

They had a whole lot of day care centres participating, at half of them they didn't do anything, but the other half of the day care centres, they sent a letter home with the children one day and the letter said: 'As you all know the official closing time is 4pm. Since some of you have been coming late, we, with the approval of the authority of the Authority of Private Day Care Centres in Israel, have decided to impose a fine on parents who come late. As of next Sunday you will pay a fine of new Israeli shekels of 10 – that's about US$2.50 Australian.

You'll be charged this every time your child is collected 10 minutes late, so after 4:10pm. It will be calculated monthly, and you'll pay it together with your regular monthly payment."

So it's a small fine basically saying this is the wrong thing to do, we want you to be more generous, be more careful, be more diligent, show up on time. It seems like that should have some effect. That should encourage people to come on time.

What they found was something quite surprising, at least to them, that they tracked what happened over roughly a 20 week period, so about five months.

What I'm showing you here is - at each day care centre on average, how many parents were arriving late. You've got this blue line for the 'no fine' condition, these are the parents who just went along as usual; and the other colour – mustard – for the fine condition.

So you can see the number of people who came late. You can see for the first roughly four weeks, they're about even, they're pretty much matched at about between eight and ten parents coming late each time.

Then something very strange happened, remember in the 'fine' condition, this mustard-coloured bar over here, you should see that fewer and fewer parents are coming late because they're being fined.

What a great way to show people that this is the wrong thing to do than saying "You will be fined," this is what the police do all the time, and in theory, that should work, but what you find is the reverse.

Suddenly these parents are coming later more and more often, and they continue to do that for the full five months. If ever there were a backfire, this is it. so don't come late, we'll charge you $2.50 every time you do. Okay we'll come late.

Backfired completely, and what this shows is a complete lack of understanding of the motives that drive humans, what makes them do the right thing. People don't do the right thing because you give them money to do the right thing, unless it's an extremely large amount of money, but what happens here is when you say "You will pay $2.50 every time you come late," is you are giving this wrong behaviour, a price.

You're basically saying "You can come late if you want, and as part of this new system, it's going to be an economic transaction. You've obviously told us you think it's worth to you, more than $2.50, or 10 Israeli shekels. You're basically changing the conversation.

In the first place the people in the blue bar, they don't come late more often than that because they feel bad, but as soon as you make it about money, you change the nature of the conversation completely.

You basically say "It's okay to come late as long as you're willing to pay a bit of extra money to us at the end of every month" and so that's what parents do. They feel licenced and liberated to do the wrong thing. You've actually discouraged generosity by making it a conversation about money.

Now sometimes you get the opposite, so in this case what we've seen is that a fine makes people do more of something, very strange.

At other times we try to give people a bonus, a little bit more money to encourage more of a behaviour, and I'm going to show you a case of where that backfires as well, again, by making the conversation about money.

This is a study from Sweden and in Sweden like in so many other places, it's very-very hard to get people to donate their blood, and we never have enough of the rare blood types.

So what they did was they said to people on the street in Stockholm: 'What we'd like you to do is go around the corner, there's a small bus and we've got some doctors there and some people who are trained in drawing your blood. What they're going to do is they're going to do a very quick pin prick test to determine what your blood type is, and if it happens to be one of the rare blood types, you'll donate blood.'

So they had these people go around the corner and they were hoping that some of them would participate.

What I'm showing you here is: this here is the percentage of people willing to undergo the screening to see if they had this rare blood type, so you can see it goes from 0 to 60 on that left vertical axis.

Then there were three different versions of that request. The standard request was no reward where they just said "Please do it because it's the right thing to do" and this, I found very surprising, I found it very impressive that these people who are randomly approached on the street, 43% of them were willing to undergo the screening.

That's fantastic, that's a huge number. Some of them were told: "To thank you for your time and the energy and the pain of the pin prick, we'll give you $7.00."

Now what do you think happened when they said “We’ll give you $7.00”? Did more people do it?

No. It declined to 29%. Yeah you’re getting the benefit of doing the right thing plus $7.00, yet you see less of the behaviour. You can understand why that is, you don’t want to go home and say “I did a good thing today for $7.00” it undermines that incentive which is to feel good about yourself.

That’s what really drives people when they do charitable acts, they want to feel good about themselves and that’s why when you hear of a teacher who shares your name, you want to be generous towards that person because it feels like you’re getting something great out of that, and it’s not something tangible and it’s not money, but it’s something that’s a lot more important in the context of communal generosity.

So here’s one last condition that I think was really instrumental in explaining what was going on.

The last condition was similar to these two, with a tweak, and what that tweak was, was people were told: “Instead of getting the $7.00 so you can take it away with you, we’re going to donate that $7.00 to a charity that you choose, on your behalf.”

So what’s great about this is you’re getting $7.00 that augments that feeling of doing good, you’re basically saying ‘do the right thing by donating blood, and we’ll do the right thing on your behalf by donating to a charity of your choice,’ and as you can imagine, people really responded to that.

The donation rate, or the willingness to undergo that pin prick test went up to 52%, more than half the people.

So what’s critical about these examples: the day care centre is Israel and this one over here, is if you understand what motivates people, what’s really driving

them – often it's not money – and by making the conversation about money, you actually make it much less likely that they're going to be generous.

It's a very, very powerful demonstration, and this is all is wrapped up in this idea that we want that connection with the cause, we want to feel like we're doing some good to a particular entity that's really concrete and physical and we can see it in front of us, and it feels like an extension of ourselves almost.

That's why – we heard a little bit earlier in the previous panel, that you really want to feel that there's this overlap of identity between you and who you're giving to.

That's a huge thing we want to engender which is why videos work so well, and why charities to help children in lesser developed countries work much better when it's just kid that you're helping, rather than 100 faceless, nameless children; which is a problem obviously, because we are trying to help big numbers, but by making it about this one specific, concrete person, we feel that there's a strong connection there.

That shows this very vividly.

I want to wrap up by talking quickly about whether these small acts of generosity really matter because as I said, I've been interested in this question of how we can encourage small acts of generosity and a lot of people say, you know, these don't really matter.

Whether I give a couple of bucks doesn't matter. It doesn't change how people really see me. I don't feel like I'm that different a person for doing it. It's not like I'm responsible for building the new hospital, or the new school.

I want to show you some research, it's very, very new.

It was only published a couple of weeks ago, and it's research by Nadav Klein and Nick Epley, who's a colleague of mine who works at the University of Chicago and his student.

What they did, I think it was very clever, they wanted to try to work out how we feel about people who do acts that are either generous or ungenerous. How do we feel about someone who does a good thing or a bad thing? Do we like them more, or do we like them less, and how much more or less?

And what they did was they said – we're talking about a professor, so I've given him a pipe. I've never smoked a pipe but I feel like sometimes I should just walk around with one, it seems appropriate – and they said a couple of different things.

Each person who participated in this experiment – there were thousands of people – they were each given one version of the experiment, so one of them might have been told: "In the positive condition this professor gets a research grant." It's $80,000 to help him do his research, but then they're told that he gives some certain amount of that to poverty research, to do poverty research, so he's doing a generous act, and they're told that that amount varies.

Some people are told he gives away zero dollars, some $10,000, some $20,000-$30,000-$40,000, all the way up to $80,000 it sort of varies. Some people see him giving away all the money, some see him giving away none, and others see him giving away some intermediate amount.

Now other people were told something different about this professor, that he was a little bit ungenerous. He finds a bag on the ground with $80,000 in it – it sounds fantastic – and then he keeps a certain amount for himself which is his act of ungenerosity. He really should probably give it all back if he's doing the absolute right thing.

He either keeps zero, $10,000 - and so on, all the way up to $80,000, so you can see this professor is being described in all these different ways.

Now each person only sees one version of this professor. He's either doing something generous and giving away some of his grant research to aid poverty research, or he's taking some amount of money as a sort of 'reward', a self-imposed reward for finding this $80,000 in the bag. They wanted to know, how do people feel about these different amounts?

I'll explain why I'm focussing on this in a minute.

So here we have the results on how much you like this person. They had a scale that went from 0 to 100 and the green line is going to be the donation group, and the red line is going to be the group that takes money out of this bag where they find it.

Now what's striking about the green line is that someone who donates none of the money to charity to aid poverty research is not particularly well liked, but if you look at the rest of that line, it doesn't matter how much you donate, even the lesser amount makes people like you a lot more.

You are basically classified either as an ungenerous person, or just a sort of nondescript person, or you're a generous person, and that's true whether you donate all or just a small amount of that grant money to this poverty research.

So what this shows you is that people are insensitive to, as we say 'scope'.

They don't care how much you donate, you just become someone who seems like a generous person for donating at all, and that's a good way to explain to people why some act of generosity really matters.

We can't all donate enough to support an entire hospital, but even small acts of generosity leave people thinking of us more positively.

What's interesting about negative acts is that it's very different. People judge you harshly depending on how negative your act is. So here they're insensitive to how generous you are, they are not insensitive to how negative your behaviours are, and so if you do the wrong thing, if you're ungenerous, the more ungenerous you are, the more judgemental they are, they more they dislike you.

But what we see for acts that are generous, is that the scope doesn't matter. It doesn't matter how generous you are, people respond to you positively. So this is a good argument for small acts of generosity in a community.

Even if the act is not huge, it's incredibly beneficial and it leads people to see you in a different way.

I just want to wrap up there. I've talked a little bit about how it's important to have this personal connection: make things about the person who's doing the generous act; make sure there's a strong connection between them and the person they're doing the generous act for; and if you use names, if you use connections, even minor, very minor forms of connection, you have a much stronger grip on their desire to do something generous and do something good.

And with this, I think we're in a much better position to herald the renaissance of communal generosity and I'd love to take some questions. Thank you.