Charity Begins at Home
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The “Season of Giving” is upon us. The countdown to Christmas has begun. In the non-profit world marketing campaigns and letters of appeal are poised to hit your mailbox at the exact moment you are motivated to write a check to your favorite charity. In a community where people and pets are connected, charity should begin at home.

In my role as a fundraiser for a number of local charities, I continually attempt to educate my audience in the need to “know thy charity”. It is common for a person to tell me how they donate to one of my organizations on a monthly basis. I politely thank the person and ask for a name so that I can make a mental note. The vast majority of the time, I have no recognition of the name, because the local organization is not the recipient of their donation. The donor is sending a donation to a national organization that supplies an envelope monthly thinking that the funds magically trickle down to those of us providing the service locally.

Do not assume that just because the name sounds the same that the local organization gets funding. Do your homework. Make a simple phone call or better yet, pay a visit to the local organization. Ask to speak to the director or a board member in order to determine the use for your donation. While you are there, ask to see the operation in which your investment will be put to use. Transparency and accountability are important attributes. Any organization that is accepting money from donors should have open books and open doors at all times. Anything less should cause you to question why there is a lack of full disclosure. Do not enable a negative behavior by endorsing it with your financial support.

Does the mission and vision of the charity meet with your personal mission and vision? Perhaps you want to support an organization that helps animals. But what specifically do you want your donation to accomplish. Is it assisting animals that are in need of medical treatment or do you want to end needless euthanasia by supporting the reproductive preventatives of spaying and neutering? When sharing your hard earned money, be sure that organization shares your passion, specifically.

In speaking to a local retailer recently, she lamented about the enormous number of requests she gets for material donations. Today, it is common to see multiple canisters at the check-out register asking for a donation. Wise donors don’t just hand over their donations to just any organization. Tax consequences may exist for individuals who give to a group that is not classified under the IRS code 501(c)3 as a legitimate non-profit. Scam artists that talk smoothly by phone or in person abound. They are eager to take advantage of your goodwill. Only your commitment to thoughtful consideration and discipline will protect your generosity.

Once you find that organization that fits your philosophy, your vision and your scrutiny, concentrate your giving to such a charity. If your mailbox is full of free gifts and constant appeals, you need to question how that organization is spending your donation dollars. Mailing, printing and t-shirts are not cheap. Your every donation dollar should be treasured and spent on the things that move you to donate in the first place. In a community where people and pets are connected, charities multiply like stray cats
and it is a dog eat dog world when it comes to fundraising. Reward those charities who make your heart smile like a puppy on Christmas morning. You will have given a gift that keeps on giving.