

FEATURE Science of Giving Generosity Is in the Genes

Have you ever wondered why your organization's fundraising efforts are effective on some individuals while completely missing the mark on others? The latter outcome can lead to a lot of soul searching as you grasp for reasons. Was it the wording? Did I come on too strong? Should I use more facts and figures? Would an emotional plea work better? It's possible the answer to all those questions is "no." The answer, it turns out, may be in our genes.

Back in January 2008, findings published in the research journal *Genes, Brain and Behaviour* offered a deep-seated reason for why some people are quick to give their time, energy and money to your cause while others decline: It's part of our DNA. More specifically, it's rooted in a variant of the gene AVPR1a.

The findings emerged from research conducted by a team from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Their simple experiment started with 203 online players who were given \$12 and the choice of keeping all of it for themselves or sharing it with another player. After reviewing the results and analyzing the DNA samples provided by the participants, the researchers discovered that those with the AVPR1a gene variant gave an average of 50% more money than those without it.

"The experiment provided the first evidence, to my knowledge, for a relationship between DNA variability and real human altruism," said Dr. Ariel Knafo, a member of the university's Psychology Department, in a [press release](#) sharing the research team's findings.

The biology behind the generosity is a bit complicated. To put it simply, AVPR1a is involved in the production of a hormone that has been connected to social bonding. Those in the experiment who were more likely to give were also more likely to have a variant that increased AVPR1a activity.

So the next time you run into an individual who is particularly reluctant to contribute to your organization, remember the reason could be encoded on their DNA. That doesn't mean you should give up, though; it just means you'll feel that much better when you earn their support.

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