

## KT COMMUNITY COFFEE BREAK

# The Science of Helping

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We can all use a little inspiration and connection these days, so recently, we began a new conversation series at [Kilpatrick Townsend](#)—**KT Community Coffee Breaks**. Each month, we'll hear from a thought-provoking speaker on a social impact or sustainability topic.

In January, the incomparable Chris Jarvis of [Realized Worth](#) kicked off the series with a talk about the science of helping.

### Our brains are wired to help others. But why?

It feels good to help. That nice feeling is due to an endorphin rush. When you provide help or do something kind, your brain experiences the same satisfaction and euphoria as a runner's high.<sup>1</sup>

We don't like to experience pain. When we see someone else in pain, our brains also produce a pain response. This is the physiological basis for empathy,<sup>2</sup> and we experience the need to do something about it

For our ancestors, the biological need to help others ensured the continuation of our species. The dark side of empathy is that we can be immune to the needs or suffering of others who are not part of our "in groups."<sup>3</sup> Our brains need proximity to develop empathy. Through experiences and imagination, we can expand our "in groups."<sup>4</sup>

### But what does this have to do with social impact or responsible business?

Volunteering, pro bono, donating, serving on nonprofit boards, removing snow from a neighbor's driveway, or a small act of kindness all build new pathways in our brains and open our minds to the needs of others and how we all belong.<sup>5</sup>

To make room for that sense of belonging, corporate social responsibility leaders and volunteer leads should take an extra couple of steps beyond organizing an engagement opportunity. Before beginning the event or initiative, set the stage to explain the impact and value of what the volunteers are about to do. Afterward, provide space for reflection. By giving people an opportunity to make sense of an experience (*What did I learn from this experience? Was it what I expected?*), we can create transformative experiences and inspire humans, including busy professionals, to do more good and expand their belonging to others.

### How has engaging in the community opened your perspective?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.webmd.com/balance/features/science-good-deeds>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.ted.com/talks/jeremy\\_rifkin\\_the\\_empathic\\_civilization](https://www.ted.com/talks/jeremy_rifkin_the_empathic_civilization)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/3f5c647a-7768-11e5-a95a-27d368e1ddf7>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/22/magazine/the-brains-empathy-gap.html?\\_r=2](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/22/magazine/the-brains-empathy-gap.html?_r=2)

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.ted.com/talks/vilayanur\\_ramachandran\\_the\\_neurons\\_that\\_shaped\\_civilization](https://www.ted.com/talks/vilayanur_ramachandran_the_neurons_that_shaped_civilization)