Giving is such a simple thing to do

- *By Véronique Cotnoir*

For many people the holiday season is a period made for sharing. We buy gifts for our beloved ones, prepare lots of food to feed more people than we actually know and sometime contribute to a cause by donating our time. In short, Christmas and the few days that precede and follow it have our expenses as much as our bellies swell.

Since the past couple of weeks I have noticed how much people want to make a difference in our society driven by performance and individualism. The media comes together to collect donations that will be used to provide a little warmth in households that need comfort. Some colleagues of mine and me will give a few hours to a charitable organization where we will prepare a meal and sort clothing. Some artists gather to raise funds for various causes. The country is witnessing a great uniting effort during the month of December of each year. Would it be Christmas carols and the snowflakes that remind us of the reality of the less fortunate around us? Why are we so willing to give during this time of year? Why don't we give every day? I anticipate some reactions. If this is your case, I'd be curious to know your definition of "giving".

Like many things in my life, my concept of "giving" has evolved over time. As a child, I thought that if I gave a sticker to a friend, she would inevitably give me one. For the little Véronique of 6 years old, giving meant trading. Entering adolescence I was giving hoping that I would eventually receive a little something in return. It did not matter whether it was some attention, compliments or the last Backstreet Boys CD, all I was expecting was some recognition. The 15 years old Véronique was diligently looking after the fruits of her investments. And then adulthood came with the realization that I was blessed in this life. I began to give more time to people around me and to causes that I had at heart. From my actions people were only seeing a very generous person who cared about others. Deep within myself through, I knew I was giving for a reason. Giving meant shining and I was using my "good actions" in order to impress and upgrade my image of the perfect young woman. The Véronique of not so long ago had yet to understand something.

Becoming aware of these developments helped me define how I want to give now. I think it is not necessary to wait for the anniversary of a beloved one or a colleague, Christmas or any other celebrations, a friend or son's graduation, a cousin's wedding or a promotion in order to give. Giving has nothing to do with throwing out a dinner party or giving someone a beautifully wrapped present, although both are two highly pleasant things. Giving is something that is very simple and subtle.

It can occur without much effort repeatedly throughout the day: opening a door, letting a pedestrian pass, stroking your pet, listening to your child sharing his new discovery, calling an aunt, sending an e-mail to a former teacher you particular liked, offering your help to a colleague, smiling at the person who cleans your office or even saying thank you to life for your comfortable bed that you enjoy every night. True giving means expecting nothing in return. It means having no game plan. It is as simple as that!

You can also give yourself. Taking the time to cook yourself your favorite dish, allowing your mind and body to be lazy once in a while or letting a dear friend of yours taking care of you are just a few ideas. When you truly give to yourself you do it with gratitude. This leaves of course no room for self-guilt.

Enjoy your holiday season with your relatives and friends. Have fun and don't forget to give you some time to relax and invigorate.

Merry Christmas and Happy 2011! I'll see you again next year ☺