

Ubuntu - the philosophy we need to follow right now

By [Marc Lubner](#)

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As a philanthropist rather than a psychologist, I know more about people helping each other than I know about why they do it. What I know at the moment is that we're seeing much more in the way of actual help for those affected by coronavirus than I've seen for any other cause, anywhere in South Africa, ever.



Marc Lubner, CEO of Afrika Tikkun and Birgit Van Vijverberg

I'm not saying that South Africans are not usually a generous bunch. My experience is that many of us give what we can financially when a cause captures our attention; whether a monthly debit order to the charities of our choice or R5 every time we park our car in a public space, but we don't often give time or intelligence. We're too busy or don't have the headspace to think about what is actually required.

Let's be clear about this: money is much appreciated and always gratefully received. That said, I often wonder how much better our country would fare if our brightest minds got together and came up with long-term solutions to the very real problems so many of our people face on a daily basis.

But with coronavirus, it's different. Everyone is doing something to help and not just financially. Coronavirus has spurred a hands-on approach to helping that we've not seen in South Africa since the demise of Apartheid and I've spent a lot of time thinking about why?

My simple answer is because *ubuntu*.



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Siphelele Chirwa 28 May 2020



With coronavirus, everyone is involved

Ubuntu literally means humanity towards others - it's a real philosophy that permeates this country and all who live here.

For the first time ever in this country, everyone feels the same sense of helplessness. In situations like this, the human condition is to freeze or fight. It's relatively easy to bury your head in the sand – or write a cheque – when you're not personally involved in something. But with coronavirus, everyone is involved. Everyone is afraid and everyone is affected in some way. It's impossible to freeze when you're surrounded by very real suffering.

No-one has a choice but to fight and get involved because every one of us personally knows someone who is hungry. There's nothing more sobering than a close-up view of the extreme poverty in our country. We really need to pay attention because more than 1 million people are on the brink of food insecurity in our country right now.

I'm actively involved in running several philanthropic organisations that operate across townships and public hospitals and healthcare. At the start of lockdown, we put all our money into creating 40,000 food parcels to get people through a month of hardship. That was back when we thought lockdown was going to last three weeks. As we head for more than double that length of time, what now? An estimated 30 million South Africans require food parcels. And don't get me started on the volume of masks and sanitiser required.



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Learn to do with a great deal less

As all of our personal and corporate financial reserves start to wane, those of us with something are going to have to learn to do with a great deal less so that we can share with those who don't have any.

What does that look like? Maybe we buy four cabbages instead of one tiny punnet of asparagus and give three cabbages away. Maybe we learn to grow food and teach others how to do it. And maybe we learn to listen to what people need, which may well be a bag of pap rather than a bag of sandwiches.

The ingenuity we've already seen amongst our fellow South Africans has sustained us, sort of. It's the clothing factories converted into production lines for masks, ensuring continued employment for their workers and health safety for others, and the food manufacturers creating low-cost, high-nutrition, easy-to-distribute food packs, and the generosity of the neighbour who shares what they have with those that don't that will keep us limping along.



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New ideas needed

Everyone, in the true spirit of *ubuntu*, needs to keep coming up with new ideas. For instance, you know all those loyalty points you collect but never use - most loyalty card schemes are now allowing you to donate them to feeding schemes. Do it! Apply your mind and come up with your own ideas about how you can make a meaningful difference.

As South Africa heads into week nine of lockdown, the needier our people become. As you give, give enough so that your recipients can share with a friend or neighbour. In other parts of the world that's called conscious capitalism. In South Africa, it's called *ubuntu*.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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