

Chapter for Steve Forbes Book

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Cosmetic Surgery and the ROI of Giving Back

Now that the economy is showing signs of recovery from the Great Recession, what is the state of philanthropy in America? Well here’s the good news: There’s more money on U.S. corporate balance sheets than at any other time in our history. The S&P 500 and Dow have hit several high-water marks this year alone. So what does that mean for corporate and individual giving? Thankfully, these are also more robust than ever. In fact, everyone from private equity firms to venture capital to foundations and trusts are looking for more opportunities to put their assets to work. And that means generating positive returns – not just in terms of cash, but social and cultural value – something useful for the human condition.

And that’s where my Face Change Foundation comes in, bringing hope to those who stand most to benefit from our work. As founder and president of Oculus Plastic Surgery, I’m grateful that my practice has weathered the storms of boom-bust cycles for over two decades. While contributing to pioneering advances in everything from laser treatments to botox, I’ve had the great fortune

of building a successful business, not only for my family and 25 employees, but for the larger community. But for those of us who care about something larger than ourselves, no amount of commercial success provides the satisfaction of developing new ways to give back. I have always positioned pro-bono work as a central component to my practice, but over the last decade or so began looking at ways to expand our giving platform.

For me, charity begins close to home. I've always made it my policy that no patient will ever be turned away for financial reasons. People may have preconceptions about plastic surgery as a frivolous business, but I know it changes lives; and I would hate for someone to be denied the opportunity to improve their life because of the inability to pay. I'm on call to do facial reconstruction for the kinds of orbital fractures and other horrific damage done in domestic-abuse cases. Giving our time and our talents provides a sort of nourishment for the soul that always pays us back tenfold. Early on, I witnessed that altruistic spirit in the caregivers in my own life, from my mother to my wife to my own daughter – all nurses and all committed to helping others in times of trouble.

We have tried to impart to our own children that no matter what you have, 10% should be invested for emergencies and 10% should go toward helping mankind without expecting a penny back. To us, generosity and

empathy yield a more thoughtful and evolved way of living.¹

It's out of this spirit that The Face Change Foundation was formed. The Foundation is primarily focused on (temporarily) troubled teens, who no doubt have the capacity to become tomorrow's leaders, with just a quarter turn. They come from a variety of adverse conditions, be it around drugs, behavior, bullying, broken homes, or all the above. This is not just addressing a question of the physical health of victims, but equally important, their emotional health. Our self-image informs everything we do, from the types of relationships we pursue to our level of career to the decision to have a family and friends in our lives. That's why it's so fundamental for returning soldiers and victims of abuse to recover their sense of self, and Oculus is honored to provide an avenue back in for so many.

So that's the philanthropic piece. And I must admit that some colleagues approach me and say, "Chip, let me ask you something... how can you afford to just leave X percentage of your revenue on the table with these pro-bono procedures?"

And my answer is always the same. You know, business revenues are not a zero-sum game (one big pie, out of which comes charitable giving, simply leaving a smaller pie). No, each slice of civic engagement actually gives rise to

¹ Some material excerpted from *Face Change* by Harvey "Chip" Cole, III, MD, FACS. Copyright 2013.

multiple other pies. Let's leave aside questions of social consequence, and ethical duty, and just plain feeling good, that extend from this sort of work: The bottom-line benefits of corporate giving are legion. By upping your charitable quotient—and I'm talking to the business leaders out there—you will surely:

- increase marketing capacity.
- develop thought leadership around Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).
- Improve your employee recruitment and retention efforts.
- deepen shareholder trust and stakeholder value.
- drive new business development.
- burnish your reputation.

The other leg of my philanthropic vision is for those who pursue plastic surgery as an elective procedure—to disabuse them of the notion that a cosmetic procedure is a panacea. Instead I want to convey that it's a way to enhance and bring expression to what's already there.

You may not expect to hear this from a plastic surgeon, but I'm going to let you in on a little secret: cosmetic surgery alone is not going to change your life. It's not going to make you happier... it's not going to make you a better person... or a better spouse, lover, friend. What it *will* do is amplify what's already deep down inside you. And with the right approach—one that errs on

the side of subtlety, we have the capacity now to not only live longer and stronger, but look better, well into our silver years.

I've learned one thing in my three-plus decades on the cutting edge of this industry (pun intended), it's this: True beauty and happiness is an inside job. Simple as that. No amount of laser treatments and endoscopic surgery can cure a broken heart. Or make somebody fall in love with you. If you're harboring grudges, are driven by jealousy and striving ambition, maybe you'll keep getting that next procedure, hoping it will give you the peace of mind – the perfection – you've been striving for.

But let me share something with you: as you climb that mountain and get to the summit, there's always another peak, off in the distance. The finish line keeps receding. What you thought you wanted wasn't what you wanted after all, and then it's on to the next shiny object – the next nip, the next tuck.

Mind you, this is coming from someone who's performed over eighteen *thousand* procedures over the years, and I'm grateful for every minute of it... To study early on with trailblazers and even help forge new pathways on my own. To be featured on FOX and CNN, ABC, CBS, NBC and *Good Day Atlanta*, to be a pioneer in laser treatments endoscopic surgery, and be handed awards from the American College of Surgeons and the Southern Medical Association and the Consumer Research Council and the list goes on...

But when Harper's Bazaar came to me and told me I was chosen by my

physician peers as one of the top 10 cosmetic eye surgeons in the country, I wanted to say, “hold on guys, just wait a minute. Don’t you realize it’s about so much more than surgery alone...?” It’s about diet, exercise, lifestyle, it’s about being present in every moment and sharing your life with the ones you love the most. And here’s the most important piece: it’s about *happiness*.

When I first began reading John Stuart Mill and other 19th-Century Utilitarian philosophers, saying that the ultimate goal in life is *happiness*, I said to myself, “well, that’s sort of naïve, isn’t it? That may be all well and good for 1861, but this is 2013! What we really want in 2013 is power, sex, money, beauty, travel, shopping sprees, great wine, a juicy ribeye from Ruth’s Chris.” (Or Oysters and Pearls at *The French Laundry*, ladies?)

But wait a second, maybe J. Stu was on to something there. Because all those other things – all those trappings of modern life – don’t have any inherent value, do they? They only work when they’re making us *happy!* And this is something I try to share with my patients (it comes up frequently in my book *Face Change*):

- Get your mind together and good health will follow.
- Get healthy and real happiness is just around the corner...
- Get happy and guess what? All of a sudden you’re more beautiful. Your skin is more radiant. You beam positive energy, and *that’s* what makes

you magnetic. Not the perfect nose or the perfect breasts or right number of chins (joking).

We all know the ice queen who's gone in for a li-i-i-ttle too much work over the years, right? She's one half of a type-A power couple who's somehow magically always *on*. She chairs every committee, plans every luncheon, donates generously to every cause, and she looks *damn good* doing it. But you look behind those eyes and there's something... missing—a deep sadness, or a fear, or some nameless, bottomless desire. She might be missing the most important ingredient of all: true happiness.

And that's what my Face Change Foundation is all about: bringing happy back... and at the same time, it's *more than that*. It's about self-image and unleashing the beauty within.

Let's face it: when we go in for that job interview or show up on a blind date, for better or worse we're being judged for our appearance. And most definitely for our personality, which is a direct reflection of how we see ourselves. There's a feedback loop there, where the better you feel about yourself, the more confidence you project, the more beautiful you become in the eyes of your beholder. This leads to more and better promotions, more affluence, increased social status and so many of the things that make our lives rich and rewarding. It's called the "halo effect."

But again, let's not take that to far. In *Face Change* I look at celebrity surgery over the years, at what I call "The Good," "The Bad," and "The OH NO!" It's staggering, really, that someone like, say, Raquel Welch, or Sophia Loren (I'm dating myself) could be such great beauties now, when they were just hitting their stride in the 1960's! All because of judicious, skillful treatments over the years... not surgical overreach.

Or let's look at the usual suspects like Demi Moore, or Sharon Stone, or Christie Brinkley. These lovely women have been pop-culture icons for decades, and are knockouts to this day. The reason? Well, there are lots of reasons, and granted I'm biased, but I like to think that having the right cosmetic surgeon in your court can make a big difference. And also that degree of giving back, of civic engagement. Fortunately these days movie actors and other pop stars have a greater platform to fight for what's right than ever before. Think of Bono and his work with EDUN, a group dedicated to stimulating trade with poverty stricken countries. Or Angelina Jolie standing up for humanitarian issues and girls' education.

Let's face it: these are beautiful people on a beautiful mission, and for those who would aspire to their level of social consequence, the enhanced self-image that can extend from cosmetic treatment can be a great boon, and unleash the altruist within.

Who does this describe: “She was unquestionably gorgeous. She was lavish. She was a dark, unyielding largesse. She was, in short, too bloody much.” Any guesses? That was Richard Burton, speaking about the first time he met Elizabeth Taylor. That stuck with her, that striking beauty. And who did she have to thank, a great plastic surgeon? No doubt, but also her joie de vivre and embrace of social causes, which lent her long life and glamour.

So where does that leave us regular folk who may not be to the Hollywood manor born? Well, the myth, I think, is that cosmetic procedures all cost an arm and a leg, lay you up for months, and can be spotted from the Hubble Space Telescope. But I’ll tell you, in my experience that couldn’t be further from the truth. The average cost of a procedure at Oculus Plastic Surgery, for example, is just \$2,500.

You break it down, what does that mean? It’s less than \$7 per day, or a Venti latte at Starbucks. A laser eye treatment, which corrects for wrinkles, dark spots, loss of elasticity, is a little over a thousand dollars. You’re in and out and healed in less than a week. Same goes for a laser facial resurfacing, where the recovery time is about a week and it’s sort of astonishing how well it treats sun-damaged skin, wrinkles, acne scars, dyspigmentation, fine lines.

And even the more comprehensive surgical procedures, like a facelift, are in the mid four figures and correct much more effectively for things like loose skin, jowls and deep folds around the mouth. And the recovery time is still only

a couple of weeks. Done correctly, this isn't about stretching the skin into a drum-tight look of permanent surprise. It's about subtlety and art, and enhancing the natural plump resilience of the skin. It's about restoring and refreshing your own natural anatomy.

You get into the non-surgical procedures, and the investment is even lower. Things like microdermabrasion, botox, chemical peels, you're talking a few hundred dollars for a treatment that will heal immediately and last for years.

So to come back to the theme of economic impact, let's look at the macro: I must say, the landscape is somewhat different than it was when I was coming up in the industry. Heck, it's not even the same world. The American Society of Plastic Surgeons, the ASPS, have really been the standard bearers in the industry, and you see in the statistics they release a dramatic rise in the numbers of procedures over the years. In the 1960's when plastic surgery was really coming into prominence, there were what... a few thousand procedures? Do you know how many there are today? Just in the year 2012, between surgical and non-surgical, there were almost *15 million procedures* at over 11 billion dollars. That's 422 procedures for every man, woman and child in Beverly Hills.

So to the question of ROI. Whether you're a business leader in this or any other field, looking at the return on your philanthropic investment is of crucial importance. From the Greatest Generation and Baby Boomers down to Generation X and Gen Y, consumers are more informed than ever, thanks to the

internet. They have huge volumes of information at their disposal, to help them decide which companies they wish to do business with. And more than ever, they are choosing to engage with businesses that take a stand to improve the human condition, not just keep their shareholders flush.

The value proposition for giving back is easy to make on the human end: it helps us feel good and makes the world a better place. But here's the ethos I'm trying to bring to our industry, that the business case is equally compelling: The best individuals, companies and foundations are finding new ways of doing well by doing good. If every business chose from here on in to dedicate 10% of their billable hours to pro-bono work, or 10% of their pre-tax revenue to social causes, just think what our world will look like in 10 years, in 20 years, in a century. If a rising tide raises all boats, it's high time we all join together to *be that tide*.