NEW DIRECTIONS
FOR
PHILANTHROPIC
FUNDRAISING

TAKING FUNDRAISING SERIOUSLY

THE SPIRIT OF FAITH AND PHILANTHROPY

Dwight F. Burlingame
Editor

NUMBER 35, SPRING 2002

SPONSORED BY

THE CENTER ON PHILANTHROPY AT INDIANA UNIVERSITY

ASSOCIATION OF FUNDRAISING PROFESSIONALS

JOSSEY-BASS

Life does not lay itself out on spreadsheets. Although fundraising management tools are critical, they cannot become so central that we forget the most important question: Why give at all?

1

Thinking about the why of giving

Claire L. Gaudiani

THIS COUNTRY's tradition of philanthropy grew up with our redefinition, as a nation, of the relationship between individuals and society. In fact the barn raisings that occurred in the Midwest and the Northeast in the early years of this nation were early manifestations of that relationship and the predecessors of the community foundation level of philanthropy today.

The notion that every citizen is responsible for the common good seems commonplace to Americans. But in other developed countries, such as France, Germany, and Japan, people are still working to create a philanthropic sector that begins to approximate what we have here. During a 1992 trip to Moscow, I met people who told me about beautiful little chapels all over Moscow that were disintegrating. I suggested, "Why don't you get together with other citizens and pool your resources? Some of you could do the repair, and others could contribute to buying the plaster. Others would have knowledge about how the repair could be done or about the history of these chapels. You could combine your knowledge and capabilities."

But as I talked, it was as though a thick curtain came down. Finally, someone said, "The government does that. We do not do

NEW DIRECTIONS FOR PHILANTHROPIC FUNDRAISING, NO. 35, SPRING 2002 © WILEY PERIODICALS, INC.

those things." I thought to myself, You're right. You don't do those things. You have been stopped from feeling that these treasures, these gifts from earlier generations, are your responsibility. You have been encouraged to think that some bureaucrat would solve the problem. This prevents you from taking an opportunity to engage as fellow citizens.

Suddenly I realized what it was to belong to a nation that had inculcated in me, in all of us, from grammar school on, a sense of personal responsibility for our country's well-being.

But why should we give? Where does our sense of personal responsibility come from? Over the past ten or fifteen years, people of wealth and, I dare say, many of their professional advisers, have shifted their focus to the management techniques of philanthropy—things like structure, quality management, and assessment. Of course, I believe in those things.

But I also believe that life cannot be laid out on spreadsheets. Management tools are critical, but they cannot become so central that while we are focusing on what, how, and when to give, and when to give again, we forget the most important question—why give at all? I do not mean what we are trying to accomplish in a specific community or entity, but more fundamentally, why should we engage in philanthropy at all?

Some years ago, I traveled around the world with Elie Wiesel conducting a series of lectures called "The Anatomy of Hate." In the process, I began to realize that the question, Why do philanthropy? Why give? really means, Why love one another? And what does it mean to love one another and to reject hate and indifference?

Why should we give? An American answer

As Americans, we emerge from a wisdom tradition found in a collection of sacred and civic texts. These texts talk about relationships between and among people. In profound ways, they have shaped both our being and our doing in the world by describing who we

are supposed to be with respect to each other. By looking at these texts, we can answer the crucial question, Why give?

In the Hebrew Bible, we hear again and again two great commandments: first, "love thy God with thy whole heart and thy whole mind"; and second, "love thy neighbor as thyself." These two commandments are fundamental to the three faiths of Abraham: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The call is to a critical relationship with each other based on love—a hierarchy of loving God and loving your neighbor as yourself.

Thus the first answer to the question of why give is, I am called to carry out the loving of the other in the same way as I love myself and those for whom I am responsible. (Later, in the Tractate Peah of the Talmud, "the other" is defined not just as family or fellow Jews but also as all others.)

Also in the Old Testament is the prophet in Deuteronomy who says, "Justice, only justice that you may thrive." Note that it is not "Justice, only justice that you may please God" or "Justice, only justice that you may please your mother." Why be just? Why share what you have? Because from just sharing comes your own thriving, not in the next world but in this world right now.

The call to give emerges from a call that is many thousands of years old. Throughout the Hebrew Bible are calls for people to respond with justice, love, and generosity because those responses sustain not just families and small communities but the whole of human society, the whole of human beings on Earth.

In the Christian Bible, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, a lawyer says to Jesus, "I want to be a good person. What should I do?" Jesus simply quotes the two great commandments, the second of which is, love thy neighbor as thyself. The lawyer asks, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus answers with the parable of the Good Samaritan: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. . . ." That parable is everybody's story because it tells of a human being who was of a different race, religion, and ethnicity from the man he finds beaten and robbed, but nevertheless he sustains that person while continuing his own work.

Interestingly, the Samaritan does not stop his trip to care for the man. He takes him to an inn, drops him off, and says to the innkeeper, "I have to go on with my business, but whatever you spend I will reimburse you to take care of him."

The relationship the Samaritan felt to that man was based on what you and I have in common, and maybe a lot less. The Samaritan shared with the beaten and robbed man a preexisting condition called human being. That story illustrates a fundamental relationship that we are meant to feel with each other regardless of other relationships of kinship, ethnicity, religion, educational level, or economic level. This is our tradition, and it connects directly to thousands of years of sacred texts—not only those in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Why give? Answers from other traditions

In the traditions of Islam, there are five pillars of prayer. The first is prayer, praising God, and the second is charity, zakat. References to charity are more numerous in the Koran and in the Hadith of Muhammad than any other references, except the call to praise God. Muhammad lays out two distinct kinds of charity: tithing, the specific percentage of annual income that all people owe to their community, and giving more anonymously, more personally, which draws us to a sense of personal generosity. Muhammad is also specific about the positive effect on children of seeing their parents make these commitments of generosity. His text offers the concept that relationships built within communities are relationships built on the witness of the young. This concept has enormous significance for parents who seek to transfer their wealth as well as their wisdom and experience to younger generations.

The same call to generosity is found in the Hindu doctrine of *ahimsa*—the concept of loving and caring for all living things as we wish to be cared for. Hindu texts call specifically for measures of generosity, tenderness, and caring. It is no coincidence that Mahatma Gandhi emerged from that faith and that Martin Luther

King Jr. was strongly influenced by Gandhi's teachings on nonviolence and the dignity of the other and of all living things. Thus Hinduism is now present as an asset in our society through both the civil rights movement and the words of Martin Luther King Jr.

The great texts of Buddhism and Confucianism describe the Eastern tradition that focuses on the development of self within the community. According to the tenets of Confucianism, the only way I can find or know myself is to see myself reflected by the others to whom I am in service. To the degree that I curtail my generosity, my relational giving, my presence, and my support, I am unable to understand who I am in the world. My self-knowledge is limited by the boundaries of my willingness to engage in generosity toward others.

In Buddhism, the self is in a dynamic tension between the call to be contemplative and the call to lead the world, between the call to focus on the inward self and the call to community service through public policy and action. Western frameworks seem to ask us to choose one or the other of these two poles, but Buddhism teaches that the self exists in the dynamic space between the poles. Feeling the two poles and moving toward each of them creates the dynamic space in which the self materializes.

Similarly, the call to generosity exists in the texts of indigenous religions, such as the Yoruba faith in Africa. Here, as in the world's largest religions, the call to generosity is presented as a way of keeping self, progeny, and community well and strong.

Civic texts also support giving

Although the United States was born out of these powerful religious texts, it also developed out of an equally powerful tradition of civic texts, such as those that began to generate concepts of democracy in ancient Greece and Rome. In ancient Athens, for example, a citizenship test was whether an individual could prove that he loved Athens more than winning. What if every U.S. citizen every year had to list the number of times he or she had shown

love for some larger entity more than winning, or more than what would benefit him or her personally? Again, the notion appears that we must be generous to others rather than focusing on ourselves.

The ancient texts can be traced through Renaissance Italy and the seventeenth-century French moralist tradition, right up to the founding of the United States. The U.S Declaration of Independence says that all men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. In those same texts is a framework for intellectual property rights. Why is this framework important? Because protection of intellectual property rights gives the individual opportunities to prosper by sharing ideas that will contribute to the common good. So this concept contains two pieces: one focuses on generosity and the common good, and one focuses on the rights and well-being of individuals. In this framework, we discover a great host of American texts that have helped to create and define contemporary society in this nation.

A second American century grounded in generosity

This nation began its twenty-first century in a period of great prosperity, and some observers, particularly Mort Zuckerman (1998), have predicted that we are on the brink of a second American century. Zuckerman offers a whole set of reasons, mainly to do with the nation's economic and military might; still, achieving a second American century will require more.

Two strong and beautiful threads are woven through American history. One represents our talent as a nation for creating prosperity. The other represents our talent for creating social justice, for drawing ever closer to the ideals of equity and fairness expressed in our nation's founding documents. These threads appear throughout U.S. history—all too often in very different and unrelated places. Today, those two strands must be intertwined with the call for generosity that informs our human wisdom tradition.

The second American century will be ours both because of the tremendous economic prosperity that our form of government has created for us and because Americans will stop viewing philanthropy as something nice to do on the side. Rather, Americans will combine their management strength with the wisdom tradition's call to form relationships based on recognizing the dignity of the other and the call to love one another. It is only by understanding that, first, generosity and justice and, second, economic prosperity are two sides of the same coin, not two completely different things, that this country will move into the leadership position it deserves in the twenty-first century. Why give? Because generosity is a fundamental element of democracy, because generosity works to create peace, and because generosity creates thriving. Generosity creates more wealth both for the individual who gives and for the community to which the recipient belongs. People in the philanthropic community must communicate this message to the individuals with whom they work, and to their progeny, to make the dream come true.

Reference

Zuckerman, M. "A Second American Century." Foreign Affairs, May–June 1998, 77(3), 18–33.

CLAIRE L. GAUDIANI *is a research fellow at Yale Law School, former president of Connecticut College in New London, Connecticut, and president of the nonprofit New London Development Corporation. The author of six books, she is currently completing a volume on the wisdom tradition of philanthropy.*