

# Contributing to Philanthropy

Some easy to follow guidelines can help maximize impact of donating time, money to charitable causes.

By **DAN ROTHBLATT**

**T**HOSE who follow charitable giving know that a week rarely passes without news of a megadonor's eight- or nine-figure philanthropic gift. Such donations are vitally important to our colleges and universities, hospitals, research facilities, and arts institutions. They are pivotal in lifting us as a society.

Downtown's Walt Disney Concert Hall, an icon of Los Angeles, would not have been possible without the generosity of the Disney family, which contributed more than \$100 million toward its construction. In addition to those lead gifts were thousands of donations from project supporters of ordinary means whose love for music and the city spurred them to give to this transformative building.

Put another way, if megagifts are the building blocks of philanthropy, then smaller contributions from a large number of other donors are the mortar.

As a philanthropy and nonprofit professional of more than 30 years, I know that each of us can make a difference in improving our world. Philanthropy is something everyone can do. It begins, simply enough, with a desire to help rebuild our world.

As a tumultuous 2016 comes to a close, this is an opportune time to reflect on how events have affected us, our families, and our society, and to consider how we can be personally engaged in being charitable – in Hebrew the word is *chesed*, an act of kindness.

Here are five tips on how donors can make a difference:

- **Find causes that speak to you.** Ask yourself what you can contribute to these causes – financially, volunteering your time, or both – to make a meaningful impact. Think about acting collaboratively with friends or family members to leverage your resources with the power of collective action. Consider joining a local giving circle; addressing pressing societal issues affecting women, children and families; participating in community activities such as Big Sunday, which organizes hundreds of volunteer opportunities; or crowdsourcing or other online campaigns. The viral success of the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge, for example, resulted in more than \$100 million in contributions which made a huge impact on ALS research, services, and public awareness.

- **Embrace volunteering.** One of society's greatest and earliest movements, volunteerism is enormously gratifying. Locally, we are blessed with a groundswell of grassroots charities, many in the form of startups by social entrepreneurs inspired to solve an unmet need. These can benefit not only



from your financial support but also from your ideas and expertise – in fundraising, marketing, or organizational development – and through the simple act of introducing them to others who might also be passionate about their work.

- **Maintain focus.** Everyone, from those making gifts of a few dollars or hours to megaphilanthropists, should focus their charitable activity. At the Jewish Community Foundation of Los Angeles, where I am privileged to head philanthropic services, we emphasize this when counseling our donors. Iden-

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tify the causes or areas of interest most meaningful to you and strive to make the greatest impact possible with the resources available to you. This will mean saying no to worthy organizations, but this focus can result in greater satisfaction and involvement, and will enable the charity you support to count on and benefit from your long-term involvement.

- **Ensure your money is spent wisely.** This begins with the personal connection and focus discussed above. Next, do your homework. Helpful online resources such as Charity Navigator

and Guidestar enable you to identify nonprofit organizations that are well-managed and put their charitable dollars into impactful programs. Community foundations, for example, advise their donors on identifying best-in-class nonprofits. This gives you confidence that your charitable dollars are going to responsible stewards.

- **Open a donor-advised fund.** A donor-advised fund is one of the smartest ways to enhance your philanthropy while providing flexibility and convenience. DAFs are administered locally by community foundations, including the Jewish Community Foundation and the California Community Foundation, and nationally by investment management firms such as Fidelity and Schwab. They can be created with as little as \$5,000 in cash, securities, real estate, and other appreciated assets. With a DAF you can place all your charitable dollars in one account and receive an immediate fair market value tax deduction on the assets you gift to it. As the term “donor advised” indicates, you recommend grants to causes you choose, with no time limit on when to make those gifts and no minimum annual distribution requirements.

Philanthropy expert and author Danny Siegel has a great saying: “Philanthropy is where heaven and Earth touch.” By following these simple rules of thumb, your charitable giving will become much easier and, without question, can be one of the most fulfilling parts of your life.

*Dan Rothblatt is senior vice president of philanthropic services at the Jewish Community Foundation of Los Angeles.*

## Recreational Pot Could Burn Employers

By **HOWARD C. SAMUELS**

**E**MPLLOYERS, get ready. Walking through your doors in our brave new world of legalized marijuana will likely be any number of employees stoned. If you ask yourselves just how pot – more pervasive and public – will impact the workplace, the short answer is: in ways you won't like to imagine, none of them pleasant.

**A frightening argument is that smoking a joint is as acceptable as having a beer at lunch. Not by a long shot.**

My vantage point is unique, blending both the personal and professional. I'm an addict in recovery (for 32 years) who owes a personal, painful path of drug dependency over the decades to smoking my first joint before age 16. It was the beginning of my five-year addiction to marijuana that was all downhill from there: heroin, cocaine, prescription drugs.

In my professional role today on the front line as an addiction therapist for 25 years, I have treated thousands of addicts, of whom I estimate 95 percent fell off that same cliff that start-

ed with recreational marijuana.

I do not have to sift through stacks of studies, because I know from personal experience and evaluating other addicts about the psychological downsides to using marijuana – the panic and anxiety attacks, uncontrollable anger, lack of motivation and impulse control, and stunted brain growth at younger ages.

### Stoned or drunk?

Apply such unfortunate characteristics to employees at virtually any business. In essence, is there any difference in coming to work stoned or drunk? The effect on your business is the same – the missing productivity quotient, employees lacking focus, motivation, sleep. There's the additional soft cost of monitoring, disciplining, and even terminating, errant employees. And, if your business relates to safety products or services, what type of testing procedures are you implementing?

A frightening argument is that smoking a joint is as acceptable as having a beer at lunch. Not by a long shot. There is a key distinction about using marijuana. Although moderate alcohol consumption can be a socialization tool, the same cannot be said for pot. Getting stoned is the sole reason for using.

There's no moderation with marijuana. This is truer now than ever before because today's marijuana is significantly more potent than what most people realize. While I don't expect everyone will become addicted to pot, my concern is that it's within the realm of probability that 10 percent to 20 percent of those trying it for the first time will become hooked and move to harder, more dangerous drugs. The notion that

marijuana helps ease PTSD, anxiety, and other health disorders is irresponsible. So does a drink of Scotch, but does that really treat the underlying disorder?

The irony is that greater access could have a positive effect on my addiction treatment business. I don't view that as positive. I accept the new law, but ask people to remember that trading on the message that the drug is harmless is a fool's mission. It's not harmless – just ask a few thousand of the permanently damaged addicts I have treated.

Understand from the get-go that any number of employees will simply want to get loaded, coast through the workday, and check out. How does one calculate this cost to business?

*Howard C. Samuels is chief executive of the Hills Treatment Center in Los Angeles and author of “Alive Again.”*

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