

# Teaching By Doing

Harry Saal

**“Setting an example is critical because, otherwise, how do people learn philanthropy?”**

A few years ago I was asked to appear in a cover story for *Newsweek* magazine. As a Silicon Valley multimillionaire, I couldn't be very private about my wealth. When you become wealthy as a result of a public offering, as I did, it's common knowledge. It's in the newspaper, in the trading reports—it's impossible to hide. But this was really scary for me. Appearing in a cover story for *Newsweek* was a high-risk activity, and not just in psychological terms. Not long before, a wealthy Silicon Valley businessman had been kidnapped. There were potentially real security dangers.

The scary part was, first, to what degree would this attract undue attention to my family and me, knowing that there could be security concerns? Secondly, I am not at all interested in gaining notoriety for myself because of my own lifestyle choices, interests, or organizations I support. I was concerned that the article might portray me in a way that could be interpreted as if I were seeking fame.

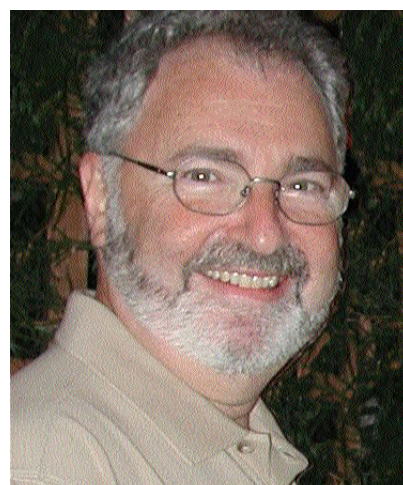
But there was too much truth in all the articles that had been written about how stingy Silicon Valley was. I felt there were Silicon Valley people who weren't giving philanthropically. “What better way to state my views,” I thought, “than in an international forum?”

Before the interview, I had had some fear of receiving too many solicitations if I were to go public in this way, but in

fact, I received only a tiny number of extra solicitations as a result. People wrote letters to *Newsweek*, which were delivered to me. A few wrote saying, “I need to go to college,” or “I have a small business I want to start,” but most said to keep up the good work. It was very gratifying. My experience turned out to be positive enough that it became the first step in a campaign I consciously embarked on to get my colleagues involved in philanthropy. I wrote Op Ed pieces, which were published in newspapers and magazines, talked at seminars, and spoke at various breakfast groups.

The lesson I took from this was that being on a public stage can affect public opinion, whereas being silent is not going to have an impact. I hope that by being public about my wealth and my philanthropy, I can help move people along a path of giving. Setting an example is critical because, otherwise, how do people learn philanthropy? I can say I want to be philanthropic, but there is still the pragmatic aspect: How do I become strategic? How do I get organized? There are a lot of specifics that a person needs to learn. If we all kept it a secret, how would anyone learn? We'd all be stumbling in the dark.

*Based on an interview with Pamela Gerloff*



To read Saal's interview with *Newsweek* (“The Wealth and Avarice of the Cyber Rich,” 12/30/96) and a column he wrote about the media and philanthropy (“My Turn: New List for the Wealthy,” *Newsweek* 9/22/97), please visit our website, [www.morethanmoney.org/issue28](http://www.morethanmoney.org/issue28).

*Harry J. Saal, Ph.D., is president of Cultural Initiatives Silicon Valley. He was the founder and CEO of Network General Corporation and the founding CEO of Smart Valley, Inc. He is active in philanthropy and community affairs, and has served as the Chairman of Community Foundation Silicon Valley.*

**For a list of pros and cons of giving anonymously, please visit [www.morethanmoney.org/issue28](http://www.morethanmoney.org/issue28).**

Reprinted from Issue 28, Who Knows You're Rich?

Winter 2001 | More Than Money Journal