

The Philanthropic Initiative, Inc.

views

Ellen Remmer, TPI Director of Family Philanthropy, recounts her own family's story of giving in excerpts from "Women's Role in Philanthropy," a speech presented to the Women's Fund of New Hampshire.

"Sondra Shaw Hardy and Martha Taylor, founders of the Women's Philanthropy Institute, wrote a book several years ago that identified six powerful qualities of women's giving that I'd like to share. See if they resonate. They're easy to remember because they all start with the letter C.

Create—women are philanthropic entrepreneurs who want to create new solutions to old problems. Examples abound of this creative spirit where women have given birth to some amazing institutions and programs that continue to shape our society. A classic example of this was Jane Addams' creation of the famous Hull House in the late 1800's which was the mother of the settlement house movement.

Change—women say they want to use their financial power to effect change, to disrupt the status quo rather than preserve it. Perhaps this is because women are more likely to have experienced and understand injustice at the hands of patriarchal institutions. Jane Fonda's recent gift to the Harvard Graduate School of Education to create a Center on Gender and Education is an example of a change-making grant. [So is] the Ms. Foundation's White House Project to put a woman in the White House.

Connect—women first connect with a cause or an organization and then commit financially to it. According to a 2001 study, 86% of women give because of strong feelings about a cause compared to 66% of men. Perhaps women have a stronger emotional or spiritual drive to connect.

Collaborate—when asked about their most rewarding philanthropic experiences, many women refer to collaborative ventures - be it with other donors or with a nonprofit organization. The New Hampshire Women's Fund is a perfect example of collaborative women's giving - designed to achieve leverage through pooled funds. The many women's giving circles that have sprung up in the past year also exemplify women's interest in learning, working and giving together.

Commit—women demonstrate their willingness and capacity for commitment through their gifts. Many women want a "hands-on" experience as part of this commitment. Women also give to a lesser number of charitable organizations than men (less than 5 vs. 6-10) suggesting a strong sense of commitment to a focused set of issues and organizations.

Celebrate—finally, Martha and Sondra saw that women bring a sense of joy to the often intimidating and political process of fund raising and fund giving. Back in the days when all that most women had to give was their time, they organized charity balls. To this day women philanthropists say they like to celebrate accomplishments and they have a wonderful knack for putting fun and joy into these efforts. Witness today's event.

Ellen's Story

At the risk of appearing to equate myself with some of the incredible female philanthropists I just cited, I'd like to share with you my own journey in the world of philanthropy. What I've had the privilege of experiencing and what I've learned about effective giving as a woman philanthropist.

My involvement in philanthropy, like yours I'm sure, is akin to an octopus. It includes personal giving, giving with my spouse and kids, giving with

my family of origin—sisters and Mom, doing fundraising, and as a professional who advises others on effective giving. But it is my giving with my sisters and Mom that I'd like to share with you today since it has been such a "women's experience" and because I'm frankly so proud of what we've done together.

We funded our family foundation about 10 years ago after selling a large part of the family business. Our motives at the time were grounded primarily in our emotional reactions to this sudden new wealth. We wanted to make some "meaning" out of our surplus and we wanted to set an example for our children.

From the start we decided to keep it to the nuclear family, no spouses, primarily because of some challenges we had encountered in our family business board. Thus, we are a board of four women.

Through discussion, some research, a facilitated meeting with TPI, we got very excited about the notion of becoming "strategic givers" and decided to focus on reducing feminization of poverty by helping girls take charge of their lives.

In the last 9 years we've given over \$1 million to girls programs—first in Boston and Connecticut and then nationally by funding research and participating in a Ms. Foundation collaborative—and more recently in Jacksonville, Florida. It has been a remarkable, incredibly rewarding and joyous privilege to participate in this family venture—both in terms of my family relationships as well as seeing the contributions that we have been able to make.

Some highlights along the way that we are honored to be involved in:

- Big events—We sponsored and organized the first ever gathering in New England of program practitioners serving girls and the budding research community that studied how girls thrive—a conference that contributed to the spawning of the Girls Coalition in Boston and increased awareness of the girls agenda.
- Participation in the Ms. Foundation's national collaborative on Healthy Girls and Healthy

Women, which is now coming out with some breakthrough thinking on effective programming and empowerment of girls.

- Funding groundbreaking research at Wellesley on differences in how girls develop and achieve a sense of self-competence depending on their cultural/racial background.
- Seed funding for an Outward-Bound program that developed new female models of leadership development for adolescent girls called Connecting with Courage.
- Sports programs for girls in after school settings – using role models from Americorps.
- And most recently, we were the catalysts behind the first ever convening of program practitioners serving girls in the Jacksonville, Florida area, which has resulted in the decision to form a girls coalition.

Through this process, we have truly enjoyed the six qualities of women's giving that I spoke about earlier. It is and continues to be an exciting journey.

Talk about connection and collaboration! Working with my sisters and Mom on the foundation has provided incredible glue, good feeling and pride. We have learned about each others' strengths and perspectives, been able to explore and identify strong family values and passions, challenged old roles and learned a great deal about working together effectively.

Similarly, the opportunity to develop and exercise our creative and changemaking dreams has been wonderfully exciting and satisfying. Philanthropy has indeed been the "free zone" where we can do anything.

Continued commitment to girls has been the hallmark of our success and also a reminder of the need to remain humble. We have learned that it is only through powerful leadership in the communities and organizations in which we work that change happens. Yet our commitment to provide the space and be a catalyst has mattered.

And we have really celebrated! Things like showing our own kids videos of the girls rowing program we funded that was profiled in Good Morning America, or simply the joy and excitement that we get from doing this work— we have delighted in the opportunity to continually learn, grow and be inspired by it.

So how can you realize your potential as a powerful woman philanthropist? Undoubtedly many of you are already on a path, doing amazing things. And for those who are still seeking your way, allow me to offer a few tips that I find always help.

Find your passion— What do you really care about? Has something touched you personally? Or does something outrage you? Inspire you?

Be a learner —It's the best graduate school in the world. Go out and visit programs, talk to people, build on what others have done.

Be strategic—Focus your gifts (or some portion), learn about the area, find niches and roles where you can add value—making a difference requires more than money.

Be creative—This is your chance to be a social entrepreneur and shape our society. You can be flexible, you can experiment with new ideas or foster that in others.

Create a giving plan—This is part of being organized and in control – budget, mission, goals.

Don't marginalize—Give out of assets too. Understand your finances so you know what you can afford to give.

Leverage your giving—Challenge others to give, provide bridge money.

And most of all, enjoy it – celebrate the power and potential of the philanthropic spirit.”

** Readers: Look for the fall/winter issue of TPI's newsletter, Initiatives, on Raising Children with Philanthropic Values, which will offer activities and advice grounded in our work with families.*



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