

Wealth Reflections

Insights on building, preserving and passing wealth – Gwen K. Harvey

A Family Philanthropy Project

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Many children have never lived through a time when food, clothing or shelter was scarce. They have never seen parents counting change at the grocery store, or gone without new clothes at the start of a school year. To some degree, understanding scarcity is a lost experience – one that may be touched through a family philanthropy project.

A family philanthropy project is a way to share your value system with your children – such as frugality or certain decision-making patterns around wealth, charity or investing. A child or grandchild – whether in adolescence or high school – who is equipped to make judgment calls about charitable giving is likely to be a better steward of their own wealth and any family wealth they may come to share. By participating in the project as a team, children will observe first-hand the kind of behavior patterns that helped to create the family wealth.

Begin by allocating a dollar amount to the project. It can be \$200 or \$2,000 or more. Call a family meeting and explain that you would like everyone, as a group, to be involved in contributing this amount to charity. You would like the children to decide which organization should receive the money. Ask family members to express and articulate their views on causes or issues that they feel passionate about.

Provide the children with a homework assignment. They can select a cause together, or choose their own separately. Provide them with a notebook to jot down possibilities while watching television or

at school. Plan a second family meeting to discuss their thoughts, observations and initial recommendations. Ask questions about their decision making process. Encourage them to consider the decision in detail rather than as a passing thought.

Follow-up steps for your family philanthropy project can include visits to various charitable organizations to evaluate the strength of their mission and their ability to manage a gift wisely.

Small, practical involvement can speak louder than words. You may want to consider engaging in a community project around the holidays. Find a food bank and volunteer as a family to package, distribute or serve meals. Wrap gifts for a children's ward at a hospital. Let your family dictate who you help and why. Encourage them to do research, engage in soul searching and ask questions.

Family meetings surrounding the topic of philanthropy can stimulate deep threads of thought and conversation. They are a way to bring family members together physically and emotionally, quite separate from the typical family holiday gathering or family meal. As the family explores ways to help others they will understand better their own security and good fortune, while realizing that so many in our world are not as fortunate. It is a lesson to be experienced; one that teaches beyond the family dinner table.

As always, please feel free to call us with questions regarding this or other planning topics.