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*Our Greatest Need:  
Human Rather Than Financial Resources*

There is a man in this community who is a philanthropic genius: he works closely with people who are in serious trouble and he helps them cope. Their well-being and his overlap. He has more street savvy than any of the drug dealers who work the same streets. He has an uncanny ability to get other people to join with him in getting things done - quickly. In the middle of it all he seems to have bottomless patience and compassion. He wins immediate trust from those he seeks to help and then earns it. He is impatient with bureaucracy, procedure, tradition, or diplomacy but he works easily with anyone who shares his concern. He is very old yet sustained by apparently limitless energy. He is uplifted by a religious vision but never seems to impose his religious ideas or values on anyone else, including those he helps.

He raises more money in the form of goods and services than he does in dollars. Sometimes he will ask for a few dollars; more often he will ask for some of your time.

In terms of efficiency and effectiveness he rivals the best organizations in the community - but he doesn't waste any of his time proving to himself or to anyone else how good he is at what he does. He's too busy doing it.

If only we had ten thousand or a hundred thousand like him.

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I don't know who said it first, but it's been said many times:  
"It's harder to give money away than it was to make it in the first place." The primary reason it is hard to give money away is that too few of us have the qualities of that old

man - the human skills and arts, the street savvy, the vocation to serve, the love of others, especially those hurting and in trouble. That is, there aren't enough of the right people to give the money to, enough people who would know how to use the money - to know whether it was *money* or something else that was needed.

Another truth that comes out of thinking about the old man is that he couldn't handle much money if you gave it to him. Even if you gave him a cluster of volunteers you'd have to distract him from his own work to train them.

Two problems emerge:

Our greatest need is for human rather than financial resources; and there aren't enough of the right people to do what most needs to be done.

We can't buy the solution to our problem.

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I want that to become a splash of cold water on the rising enthusiasm about increased philanthropic giving - especially by the wealthy. The caution is not only for them; it is also directed to those who seek to raise money for philanthropic purposes.

In our enthusiasm to direct an increasing share of the trillions of dollars that are expected to pass from one generation to another over the next several decades, we seem to assume that we will know how to best use it. More: we will assume that the principal need of philanthropy is *money* - rather than good ideas, say, or a clear sense of what is going on in society, or a firm grip on philanthropic values.

That is, we are about to follow two practices that we collectively scorn -- taking it for granted we know what is going on, and throwing money at problems instead of facing up to them.

The focus of media attention is on the donors and their agents and advisers. Less attention is given to the recipients - organizations, not individuals - and their readiness to act.

We're all familiar with the problems of foreign aid: how difficult it is to get our money to the people who actually need our help. There is considerable evidence

that the amounts of money involved raise problems of corruption. There has been less attention paid to the problems of organizational capacity and readiness, even when corruption is not an issue. Does anyone seriously believe that money will solve the problems of Kosovo, say, or of Congo, or of Sri Lanka?

Those who want to throw money at our educational problems attract less support than they once did; those who don't want to spend enough on education have carried the day. Does anyone seriously believe education can improve in a cultural that is as anti-educational and anti-intellectual as our own? After all, *look at the money we spend on education!*

Giving money away is difficult? *Philanthropy is difficult.* It is difficult to help people who are hurting or in trouble; it is difficult to improve the quality of life in the community; it is difficult to make students want to learn, it is difficult to persuade people to treat each other with respect, it is difficult to know what to teach our children in our remarkably diverse society.

Perhaps it is not more money that philanthropy needs but better ideas and deeper commitment, a clearer sense of what is going on, more reflection on and discussion of the good life and the good society and less attention for a while to money.