

Social Justice Strategies: Creating Constituents for Social Justice

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Address: Creating Constituents for Social Justice

I am going to take this question of partnerships from a slightly different angle. Yesterday in the small group that listed enabling factors and challenges to social justice, we noted that foundations occupy a unique niche between people of wealth and power and the community, and can play a bridging role between the two. So today in my remarks I am going to talk about partnering with the private sector -- both businesses and individuals -- in a way that **educates and raises awareness and thereby ultimately expands the constituency for social justice.**

My thesis is that the highest and best use of our resources, including both our monetary assets and our time and talent, is not just to make grants for social justice but to **act to expand the constituency for social justice** and that those of us in this room are extremely well positioned to do so. In fact, I would suggest that although it is not exactly in its mission statement, the Global Philanthropists Circle of Synergos was probably created to expand the constituency for social justice. I would assert that each of us has a similar opportunity to create community philanthropists circles, bringing people of power and wealth within our sphere of influence -- whether they are companies, individuals, other Foundations, or even our own Board and donors -- from wherever they are to first awareness and then action on social justice issues.

John opened the meeting by showing triangles, so let me share with you three triangles (pyramids) of my own. Pyramid One represents the constituency for social justice. I would suggest that at the base of the pyramid are *those that don't get it and don't care*. At the top of the pyramid are *those who are knowledgeable and committed*. In my opinion, the biggest group falls in the middle which I call *caring and clueless*. They care, they know they want to do something but they don't have any idea how to go about doing so.

I take a triage approach to this triangle. I don't spend my time with the bottom group. Our natural partners are in the top pyramid. I would suggest that **we spend our time with the second group: the caring but clueless**. Why? If we partner only with those that are already at the top we are going to do some great things in social justice but we are not going to expand the constituency.

So, how do we do that? First, we have to start from where they are. Most of us in this room were not born with a consciousness towards social justice. It evolved over time through our experience and our learning. What we would like to do is fast-forward that progression for other people.

Pyramid Two is a hierarchy of donor consciousness. It is based on the work of our colleague Joe Lamarta from the California Community Foundation and is roughly based on Maslo's hierarchy of human needs. What does the donor first want? They first want efficient transactions. They are looking for tax breaks, for efficiency and convenience.

They are not looking for much more than that. They next want accountability and transparency. By the way this is where we can begin to lead by example. Then they start thinking about defined philanthropic goals. This is where we start measuring and reporting and if we do it. There are other people who would say, "I can do that." They are "social," as Lamarta would say, in the sense that they possess an emerging consciousness that they are part of a community of philanthropy. Now we are getting to the higher level. This is where philanthropy becomes an integral part of who they are. It becomes a part of their self-definition. It becomes deeply meaningful for themselves and their families. Finally, identification. Let me take a minute to talk about this arena of consciousness. This is where the artificial barrier between giver and receiver is erased. This is where the person who has come down the philanthropic road begins to understand that the issues that they are addressing, that the people that they are attempting to assist, are no different than they are.

So how do we as foundations begin to move people up this pyramid? At the bottom of Pyramid Three, as I mentioned, are efficient transactions. I don't need to spend time on this; I have talked about accountability and transparency. Next, can we partner with people to create grants that accomplish goals and measure and report impact? Can we begin to create donor groups, donor gatherings, donor leaders, peer leaders within groups? Our foundation, for example, has a **donor education series** where we bring donors together around particular issues, groups of these donors who have common interests, and we sponsor a local donors forum both for people who serve in the Community Foundation family and then other philanthropists in the community. Can we help people learn? Can we facilitate their identification with their philanthropy? Our foundation will facilitate families or corporate groups to help them define their philanthropic values, their philanthropic mission statements. We also have begun an exercise called Living Room Conversations on Philanthropy. These are people of wealth who have not yet been active in philanthropy, beyond writing checks. We asked them questions such as "If you are driving in your car or reading your newspaper in the morning, what are the issues in the community that you find that you have the most concern about?" Then we ask them to think about where they have been giving and then we ask them to contrast those two things. Inevitably, what they say to us is "I have been giving out of habit, out of obligation, have been writing checks to my child's private school, but what I really care about, that I would really like to do something about, is the children that are growing up in poverty in our community." We then help them develop a strategy to move from point A to point B.

Finally, engagement with the community. We offer van tours, individual one on one site visits, take the donor to places where people are doing the kind of work that can change communities, and we open their eyes.

I am going to try to quickly go through three examples of where we have taken people from where they are to the next level.

Example 1: We have the largest privately held software company in the world right in our backyard, SAS Institute. They called us because they were sponsoring a PGA golf tournament. Golf tournaments are not high up on Pyramid Three. They were not looking for services high up on the pyramid. They were looking for a pass-through agent. The PGA will not contract with a company, only with a non-profit organization. SAS Institute

was seeking a go-between. We took that as an opportunity. What they were planning to do is to take the proceeds of the golf tournament, put it in a fund held at the Community Foundation, and then advise it out to the same organization that they have been supporting for the last ten years.

We said, "What do you really care about?" We were talking to the CEO, to a man who is in the top hundred, and he said no one had ever asked him that. He never asked himself. We asked him that and it sort of caught him off-guard. It turned out that he was interested in doing things for at-risk kids to get better opportunities in education that involved their parents, community volunteers, and their universities. He thought there ought to be resources in the universities that were geared toward that problem. **We developed eight possible grant opportunities** that would be signature programs. These would use the entire \$600,000 that would be generated through this golf tournament and not just disburse it, but do something meaningful. They chose to create a community learning center in a public housing community that would serve 100 school-aged children, twenty-five pre-school-aged children and their families.

Example 2: We just made a challenge grant to our state legislature. If you want to ask me about that, I will be glad to tell you.

Example 3: We took someone who was already at the top of the pyramid, a woman named Ann Scott who is very committed to social justice, very knowledgeable, and a university professor of women's studies. She is not a hugely wealthy person and probably didn't think that she had the capacity to make that much of a difference. I am delighted to be here in Mexico to tell this story.

Two years ago, we had the fastest growing county in terms of increase in Hispanic population in the United States. One of the county commissioners stood up at a county commission meeting and said "I am writing a letter to the immigration and naturalization service to tell them to come in and get rid of all of these illegal residents in our community." Community building? Not exactly. Divisive? Incredibly. Explosive. We knew that there was a group in our community (and I am sorry that Adriana is not here because she has been a part of these exchanges) that was doing an exchange for public officials from our community to come to Mexico to learn about the issues that are creating immigration, the issues that immigrants are facing when they come to the US, etc. He went on that trip because of a grant of \$6,000 that Ann Scott made and came back an absolutely changed human being. He got up in a public setting with the newspaper there and said "I was wrong, I was ignorant. Henceforth, I will work to make Chatham County a welcoming place to everyone who lives here."

To use our resources to partner with others, to engage with them, to raise their consciousness, to add them to the fellowship of the committed, so that maybe we can create a world in which social justice is not the cry of the few but the cry of the majority and a world in which that cry is no longer needed.