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5 Questions for Seagram icon Charles Bronfman

By Sandra Block, USA TODAY

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Charles Bronfman spent 50 years with Seagram, most recently as co-chairman. He was founding owner of the Montreal Expos and former chairman of Koor Industries. In 1986, he and his late wife, Andrea, founded the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies, a family of charitable foundations that supports programs to improve the quality of life in Israel and promote Canadian heritage. Bronfman and Jeffrey Solomon, president of the philanthropies, recently co-wrote *The Art of Giving: Where the Soul Meets a Business Plan*.

Q: What's your advice for people who want to give to charity but worry about not having enough for retirement or a financial emergency?

A: I think it's important, when people are sitting down to work out their yearly budget, that philanthropy become part of that budget. If you do it that way, you're not going to be surprised or fear it's going to interfere with your plans for retirement. The second thing you do is find out what are you really interested in. What is your passion? The subtitle of our book is, "where the soul meets a business plan." Where the soul meets the business plan is where your passion and your budget get together.

Q: How has philanthropy changed over the years?

A: It's had a sea change. In the old days people gave with their heads but not with their hearts. That was Philanthropy One. Philanthropy Two was giving with your heart and not your head. Philanthropy Three is giving with both. Due diligence is part of the business plan. You can't do anything with total emotion. People who call on the phone for this benefit or that, you don't know how much they're getting or how much the organization is getting. When people call me for a donation I always say, put it in writing. Guess what? I don't get any letters.

Q: Who are your philanthropic heroes?

A: Andrew Carnegie was certainly one of them. Carnegie was single-minded, and he did something for the whole continent. His libraries have made us a literate society. John MacArthur and his wife both said that while John knew how to make money he didn't have the foggiest idea of how to give it away. He instructed his executors to set up a foundation of experts in philanthropy and as we all know, the MacArthur Foundation is one of the superb foundations in the world.

Q: There is so much need out there. How does someone who hasn't given before decide where to start?

A: I would suggest they choose one thing to give to. Maybe something very local in their own neighborhood. The parks department might have a voluntary donation for keeping up the grounds or getting sweaters for the teams. You take one thing and you try that and see whether you get any satisfaction out of it. If you do, that's all that really matters. You're doing good for somebody and you feel good because you're doing good. Whether it's \$50 or hundreds of thousands of dollars doesn't make much difference. It's how it strikes you in your heart.

Q: According to The Art of Giving, you've long been troubled by Canadians' lack of identity. Do you think the Winter Olympics in Vancouver has improved the image of Canada at home and abroad?

A: I've been very impressed. The Canadians are suddenly upfront with their ambitions. This is the new Canada for me, and I'm quite thrilled by it.

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