

Seven Stories

Seven Philanthropic Profiles



A family that cares for its roots and wants to give together

F

For F, family is everything. She comes from a family that shaped her – and founded a family that is now shaped by her. Each generation opens up new spaces and forms new branchings that only get nourishment if the tree is well rooted – and remains permeable. What does the family tree mean? Its name is only a sound. The crest is only a symbol. Money is just a means. Yes, there was a time when the prospect of becoming stronger, more influential, wealthier appeared self-sufficient. Gone. Stronger why? More influential and wealthier for what? Those are the questions of the new generation.

In order for those who come after to still feel they belong, answers are needed. One of them is philanthropy. Agreeing on a joint cause area? Challenging. So inform, discuss, listen, object – and ultimately come to a solution that everyone not only can live with, but wants to live for.

In F's family, they opted for protecting the climate, because it affects and moves the new generation the most. It took some time to convince everyone of this. But once this was achieved, it quickly became clear to everyone how to get involved and what needs to be done. If you're going to do it, do it right. Don't stop at planting trees, but find true leverage. Support those that influence public legislation, for example, or fundamental research. Fund wisely. In other words, move your money where you can expect the greatest impact.

There are other areas that are important to F's family. To curb excesses of factory farming, for example. So many more animals suffer than people. A smaller sum is to be used for this purpose. But the core focus remains clear. Climate change is our greatest global threat. And at the same time, it is the greatest opportunity for the family – perhaps even in association with other families – to use its wealth and exert their influence. And ultimately to strengthen the tree to which it owes this opportunity.



An unwavering thinker who does with his heart what his mind commands

G

G ponders. Has to. Even if it's not always pleasurable. But there's a lot at stake. The inequality in his country? A joke, if you measure it against the inequality between his country and other countries. A joke you cannot laugh about. The difference between the people in a village in East Africa and a village in the US is just that. Some are born here and others are born there. The same people, funny or lacking any sense of humor, exciting or boring, open-minded or buttoned-up. And some with a world of possibilities in front of them. Theoretically that is. All of them only with a chair and a table in their one-room hut. An empty table. Lean season. No food.

G can do something about it. He read books, articles, blog posts, informed himself. Just give money to those in need, no strings attached? Oh yes, studies show that the locals themselves know way better than any outside organization what to use financial aid for. Or should we think further and take care of education and thus the life chances of the next generation? Looks like it's not textbooks, additional teachers or school buildings that are crucial for getting ahead in school: rather it's the diseases that keep children from learning. Malaria, for example. So distribute mosquito nets. Or parasites. So hand out pills.

And how does climate change play into all of this? What good is it to eradicate malaria in an area where future droughts will make it impossible for mosquitoes to survive anyway – while floods create ideal breeding grounds elsewhere? When it comes to helping, the solutions that seem simple and quick at first glance are often the ones that are least effective in the long term.

But at some point, funding decisions have to be made. A combination of numbers, data, facts, determined and evaluated by experts - and a pinch of intuition. Prone to error, but how would we make progress without experience? G muses. His commitment reminds him a bit of Sisyphus' stone. With one difference: Even if it's only a few grams at a time – every time G pushes the stone back up the hill, it has become just a little bit lighter. Not only for him, but also for all the families in distress where his donations already have made a difference.



A traveler who wants to help. And who will mobilize her environment

R

R travels. And reads about traveling. Then she travels again. Foreign soil is her home. So much excitement and so much beauty, but also so much suffering. And now: the opportunity to do something about it. With her money, and with the money she organizes from others.

In her mind, it has always been clear to her. It's better to support the experts on the ground, who know exactly what's best to do, than to get involved herself. Because R is a professional, but certainly not a development aid professional. At the same time, she wants and needs to understand what's really going on on the ground, what kind of aid really works, to prevent children from still dying of preventable diseases for example.

R has to be where the action is, see it, feel it, understand it - without implying she knew better and without being in the way. But only then can she also report authentically: to the many people who, just like R, do have the opportunity to bring about so much good. If she convinces them that they can make a difference. Together.

R organizes meetings, invites friends and friends of friends. She informs where help is needed. And she describes how great it feels to achieve exactly what needs to be achieved on the ground - faster and better than one would think possible from the distance. R points out how little, actually nothing of relevance one has to give up for this true and sustainable feeling of truly achieving something meaningful. Even giving away half of your wealth won't make a dent in your life. And now, my dear friends, I expect you to join in! How do we get more people on board? How much money can we raise?

By the way, when R first asked the professionals on the ground if she could pay a visit, quite a few rolled their eyes. Another donor voyeur who wants to watch her money at work. In the meantime, no more eyes roll, instead the funds keeps coming. R has mobilized her entourage. It's not a small group anymore, and their pockets are deep. And R. travels on, back and forth - and every time she returns, more will be achieved.



A philanthropist who quietly rejoices and trusts like-minded folks

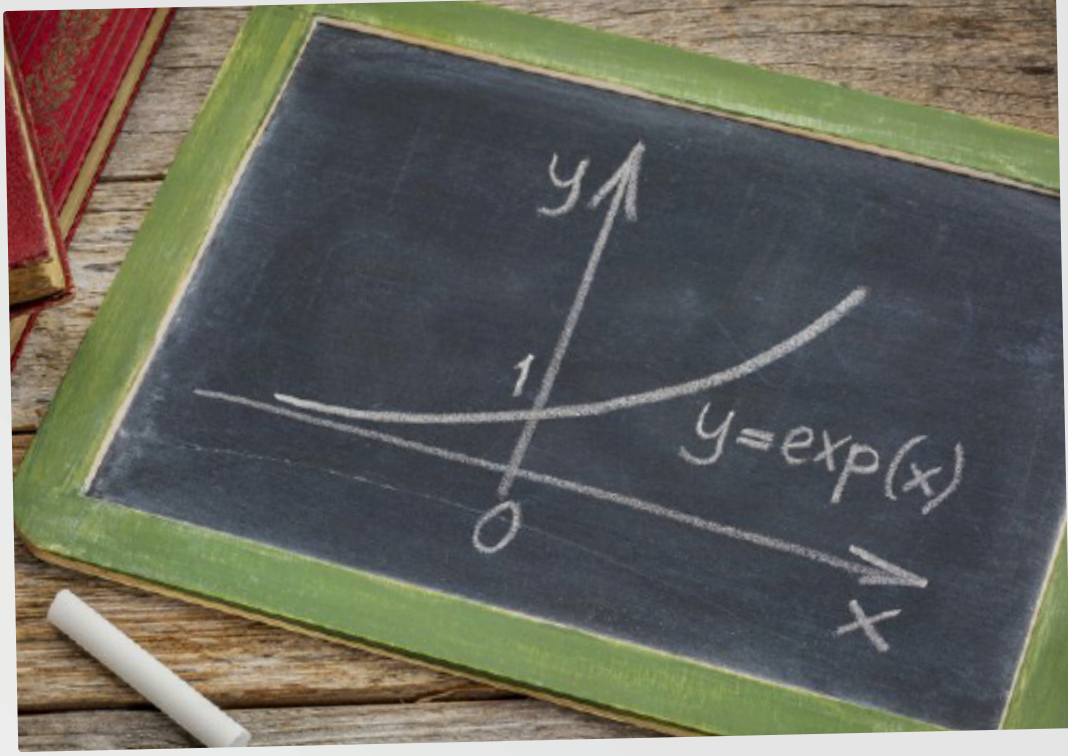
S

S enjoys quietly. The pledge from another major supporter has doubled his already substantial donation. The major supporter had made his pledge conditional on further funds being received. With his donation S was able to fulfill this condition. S could issue a press release, call friends, or at least raise his fist to the sky. But when he reads the confirming e-mail, only a smile crosses his face.

His commitment will not change the world. But it will change the lives of people S has taken an interest in for years – both in his hometown and in far-flung regions. Is it really him who brings about those changes? No, it's the money he provides. Money that he has earned. Earned? Earned, yes, but deserved? Every person deserves to be physically unharmed. Every person deserves not to die of a disease that could have been conquered long ago – to die just because she happens to live in the wrong place at the wrong time. So S helps some of these undeservedly suffering people to get back their human right of a decent life: with his means and with his possibilities. And that all this is possible for him at all, makes him happy. If he thinks about it. Actually he doesn't think about it that often.

His social network has no idea how much money he gives away, and no idea about how much money is in the bank anyway. And that's a good thing. In the end, it's quite simple: S wants to live his life – and others should live theirs. And if he can improve the conditions for some to get there, great. He doesn't need to know in detail what each dollar is spent on. But he wants to be sure that everything he supports has been independently evaluated and is constantly checked. So he can be certain: It works!

The organizations he funds are best in class. Their founders and CEOs committed, but not exploiting, neither their staff nor themselves. With ambitious goals, but a low-key demeanor. They know what they are talking about. Their goal is not to save the world, but to do what they know best even more effectively and even more efficiently. They run their shop the way he ran his. And because his money is now partnering with their expertise, many more people will be able to lead their lives the way he led his: with dignity.



An entrepreneur who fears no risk and invests in the future

U

U is an entrepreneur. Always has been. Being an entrepreneur means taking risks, albeit controlled ones. U's north star is a phrase that many can recite, but hardly no one applies to charity: No risk, no gain. Why should philanthropy be any different? Of course, there are relief efforts that have already been extensively evaluated. Distribution of mosquito nets against malaria? Check. With just \$100 in distributing these nets, you give a child at least another healthy year of life. Can you ask for more?

Yes you can. What if he could achieve even more impact with his money? 10 times more, a 100 times more? By betting on measures that are difficult to evaluate at present: because they affect the future. Protection against the next pandemic, for example, which could easily be more contagious and deadly than the last one? Or against unregulated artificial intelligence, which will soon be superior to us in every respect and eventually could realize that it has to shut down humans to avoid being shut down itself?

He sees threats that not only affect the lives of people today, but those of many generations to come. U thus has decided to support organizations that work on understanding existential risks. Even though the specific probability that exactly his donation will make a difference may not be particularly high: If against all odds it actually does make a difference, the potential to have an impact on the path of humanity could be huge. A bet, therefore: not to win in the present. Rather a bet to not lose the future.

U has stopped talking to family or friends about his philanthropy. „What's with all this speculative giving? Help the homeless person on your street, then you've done something good and you know it.“ U doesn't need or want to lecture anyone. Instead, he's connected with like-minded donors with whom he meets and exchanges ideas. Together, they know it may be nothing they'll change. Or everything.



A woman who follows her conviction and defends what others take for granted

D

D can't hear it anymore: Is democracy is still up to solving the problems of our times? Well, what's the alternative? With whom do you want to trade? With China? With Russia? With Venezuela? - D's husband thinks her worries are unfounded. Poland, Hungary, Turkey... things will work out, he says. Look at the US. We have come back, haven't we? He implores here to rather look at where sentient beings suffer in the billions with no jurisdiction at all. Factory farming in Asia, for example: unimaginably cruel, and completely unregulated.

No, says D, and no again. Animal rights come after human rights. The future of democracy is being decided now. For us and for all those who come after us. If we can't agree, let's agree to disagree and I'll just take matters into my own hands. Yes, sure, the children will inherit less. Then again: Has she ever heard someone say: „He became an impressive personality because he inherited a pile“? No. Because it doesn't work this way. If you want to provide your children with all the means they need to lead a happy life, then provide them with a safety net rather than with a hammock.

Once this was settled, it sure wasn't easy to figure out how to distinguish strong organizations in the democracy space from merely well-meaning ones. But she has done her homework. And now D is convinced of what needs to be done – and needs to be funded. She supports a group of international lawyers who challenge breaches of democracy worldwide in court. They're excellent lawyers. So they're expensive. That's why it needs D. But can you be sure that this of all options is the smartest way to preserve democracy? Nothing for the faint of heart. Measurable evidence of impact? – not easy to come by in this space. Complaints and lawsuits. You win some and you lose some. But never giving up and thus presenting a constant warning to all enemies of democracy: isn't that already success?

It's not only her husband. Many of her friends don't see the value either. Isn't that approach way too cerebral? No, dear friends. I've made up my mind. If I don't do it, no one else will. And it definitely needs to be done.



A couple making their next big start

P

If only we had woken up so cheerful in earlier days! He sighs. Or rather, woken up at all! She looks up. Better late than never, don't you think? He smiles. And pours more coffee. Ahead of the Ps lies a day that did make them wake up cheerfully – and that is supposed to wake up others, too. Their non profit foundation will report to journalists on the work of the first five years. Before that, many things had happened simultaneously. They had sold the business; and then he had inherited. And suddenly there was money, a lot of money. Then their two children moved out and started their independent lives. And now? Where to put the money, the time, the energy? And what's our future path as a couple?

The Ps were lucky. At a party, the conversation turned to eating vegetarian - and then to the topic of factory farming. And what to read on the subject. And what documentaries one should watch, even if it was hard to bear.

They did watch them. When the final credits rolled, they looked at each other. And that was it, that special moment: the beginning their new life. With one single goal: Giving a voice to suffering creatures that don't have a voice. To promote a diet that makes do with fewer animal products and does away with products from factory farming altogether. And to put pressure on the farm factories where animals don't even make it to slaughter because they die in agony before. Smart pressure. Pressure that actually achieves something.

For example, with Google ads, specifically targeted at the headquarters of fast food chains. Displaying what it's really like in the factories of their suppliers. Ads delivered to the employees. Then to their families, because this is how modern advertising works. You see it on your phone. You take your phone home. And now Google knows where you live and will target your family. Imagine the discussions at the dinner tables. Mom? Isn't that where you work? And after just a few months, the chain committed to improve animal welfare. The activist organization had the plan. And the Ps had the money to execute it. And so they did.

And this was only the beginning. Now, 5 years later, it's time to bring others on board. Set up a website. Publish a book. Distribute their film. And open the next chapter, – beyond showing the cruelty. This time it's about actual solutions that will end the suffering of millions of sentient creatures and make our species true to our claim: being human.