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4 Tips for Involving Your Kids with Charitable Giving

Involving kids in charitable giving is something parents often wonder about and *intend* to do, but life gets busy, and this effort frequently drops on the priority list. For parents who are interested in getting their grown children involved in philanthropy but aren't sure where to begin and aren't ready for their children to join the family foundation's board, here are some tips to get you started.

Tip 1: Create an Opportunity for Them to Learn by Personal Experience

Did your kid learn how to mow the lawn by you explaining how a lawnmower works over dinner? Did your kid learn ballet by reading a book about it? Possibly a little, but more likely, they learned the intricacies of edging by *using* the edger, and they learned how to pirouette in a class where they attempted it over and over again.

Learning comes when people have to use their own brains to make decisions while they're attempting something. This is true for learning to cook, learning to drive, and learning how to be charitable. You'll need to offer them an opportunity to consider what causes they want to support and let them make their own decisions.

Tip 2: Lead by Example

They say that your kids are always watching you. Even those disinterested teenagers are watching their parents' actions. This goes for charitable giving as well. If they see charitable giving as a normal thing that you regularly do, then they internalize that it is a normal thing that they will do, too.

Tip 3: Broadcast a Deadline

There's nothing quite like a deadline or an expiration date to move someone to act. If there isn't an organic deadline, then manufacture one.

Tip 4: Speak Their Language

Remember the goal is to get your kids to think and act charitably. It is *not* to get them to be passionate about *your* charitable passions. If you're a numbers person but your kid is not, they may disengage when you start talking about making the most tax-efficient gifts possible and analyzing how to do that. If you're into the arts and your kid hated being dragged to the symphony, they may not be energized by talking about whether to endow the symphony's first cellist position versus give to its capital campaign. People are wired differently. Use examples in fields that interest them.

A Practical Example

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When your family gathers for Thanksgiving, find a moment for a family meeting. Explain that you have \$XX that you must give away before the end of the year for tax reasons, and you would like the family to work together to determine where the funds should go.

Lead by example by selecting a recipient organization and explaining to your kids why you support it. Get specific and personal. Perhaps something like this:

I really love being on the board of Suchandsuch Cultural Institution. Your mom and I had some of our first dates there, it's world-class, and it is great for our city. It's been fantastic being a part of the board – I've met some impressive people, and we've been able to work together to bring in that recent successful exhibit that I'm really proud of. I'd like to take half of the \$X and give it to them from our family. I'd like you all to help me decide what to do with the other half.

My guess is that a lively and inspiring conversation may ensue, and hopefully this is a launchpad for your family's philanthropy.

This example uses all four tips listed above – you're giving them the power to think about what's important to them and make a case for it. You lead by example with your opening speech, showing how you think about it and why you make the charitable decisions you do. You offer a strict deadline, after which the opportunity lapses.

Troubleshooting

Some families may easily produce ideas for potential recipients. Other families may have trouble if charitable giving has not been a priority in the past. If your children are slow to come up with ideas, here are some options to get the conversation going:

1. Have them think about any 5K races that their friends have run in support of a charity. What are the organizations that those friends are fundraising for? Do those organization seem interesting?
2. Has a particular health issue affected a family member or friend? Would funding awareness of screening for that disease or research for a cure be of interest? Is there an opportunity to make a gift in memory or honor of that family member or friend?
3. Is there a societal problem that your kids wish could be solved? What organization is trying to solve it?
4. Have them consider any programs from their time in high school or college. Would they want to support the school's athletics or theatre program, for example, that may have profoundly affected their school career?

Some kids may want to give to organizations that you do not want to support. This particularly happens when kids are feeling rebellious. If their case is well thought-out and you can stomach it, maybe it's worth going ahead with it for the sake of family harmony and the long term goal

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of getting your kids involved with philanthropy. But sometimes it's past your threshold of acceptance. In that case, explain that you appreciate their well thought-out case and encourage them to support that organization with their own dollars, but for the purposes of this exercise, let's come up with a recipient organization you can all get behind.

Taking It to The Next Level

When the letters from charities come to thank you for the gift, be sure to send copies to your kids so they can see the impact you all have made as a family. A phone picture sent via group text message is an easy way to do that.

If this exercise turns out to be successful for your family, this could be something that multiple generations of your family could look forward to on an annual basis.

Along the way, you'll be inspiring your kids to do good in the community, training them on how to think about philanthropy, and enjoying the tax benefits as an added bonus. You may also be grooming your next family foundation board members.

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