

Out Of The Mouths Of Babies

Ah,how early our ideas about money are formed

We were enjoying a relaxing family dinner when my sister-in-law mentioned that she had given someone a \$750 Louis Vuitton handbag as a gift. Hearing that,my seven-year-old daughter Sophie looked up from her chicken so quickly that I thought she would get whiplash. “Who on earth would pay that much for a *pocket-book?*” And with that, every single member of the family looked directly at ... me. Why? Because the outburst was so clearly, nakedly and unmistakably MY voice coming straight out of Sophie’s mouth.

Our ideas about money form earlier than you might think. As a coach, I work with philanthropists who *give money* as an expression of values

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often formed in childhood, and I work with professional and lay fundraisers to *ask for money* by helping donors connect to those values.

In both cases, I help people give a Voice to their Values and Vision. And I am always fascinated to hear how early those three Vs are formed.

Values & Vision

Most children realize very early on that money has *meaning*. Money may mean “fun” to the child who gets to go to Disney World, while money may mean “deprivation” to the child who has to stay home.

Those meanings translate into values – values that we, as adults, either want to perpetuate or terminate. My clients share their memo-

ries of growing up knowing that their families wanted to contribute, repair the world, or build community. These are values they themselves want to perpetuate, and they use charitable giving to turn their values into a compelling and resonant vision for their community or cause.

I use this at home, too: When I asked my daughter Sophie what she’d like to do with her charity money, she decided to give it to the hospital NICU (neonatal intensive care unit) that had cared for her when she was a teeny four-pound baby. Her twin brother, Jacob, whose room is overrun with plastic soldiers, wants to send his to military families.

The Value of contribution is the same, but the Visions are as unique as my children are.

Voice & Avoidance

We show our money values by what we give voice to, as well as by what we avoid. At brunch with friends, we witnessed their eight-year-old son announce his mom’s salary to the guests, and get whisked away as if he had just come down with Ebola. He certainly learned what money topics he cannot talk about in public.

Similarly, when I asked Jacob why his shoes were still in the middle of the hall and he answered, “because of the economy,” I knew what I had been talking about too much at home.

Fundraisers learn that if they are hesitant to ask for a certain amount in



a solicitation, then they are doing themselves, the donors and the cause a disservice. And coaches who don’t ask to be paid what they are worth are sending themselves and their clients a message about how they perceive their value.

Whether we grew up with tight purse-strings or alligator handbags, we all make choices every day about how we express our ideas about money in word and deed. I’ll bet there’s plenty to be learned by taking a look back to move forward. In fact, I’ll even put money on it. •

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