

Not all acts of philanthropy grab the headlines  
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Philanthropy is a topic that has been debated quite extensively in the past in South Africa. I guess the economic meltdown has sort of dampened the debate.

However, the topic is actually more relevant in the economic meltdown because of the negative social implications that will arise from the state of the economy.

A typical cycle a person goes through in life can be divided into two halves: the first and the second. In terms of age, in an individual's life cycle the 20s are more about building one's place in the world. The 30s and 40s represent wealth-building.

In Jungian psychology this is termed the first half of life.

The 50s and beyond are for enjoying the wealth built in the first half of life. The transition between the two halves is termed the mid-life crisis, or individuation in Jung's terms.

The second half of life is a period when people are no longer interested in the daily operations of their endeavours but are focused on strategic issues. During this stage people take it easy and take time to explore the spiritual aspects of their lives.

Similarly, in our work, there are two stages in the typical journey of achievers who end up wealthy.

The first stage is the wealth-accumulation stage where achievers give their all to accumulate wealth. This stage always involves being hard, focused and disciplined in everything that one does.

Once the wealth has been attained the achiever goes through a transition stage where there is a vacuum. The vacuum can be ended either by starting a business venture or by focusing on giving back through philanthropic work.

In general, philanthropy is not pursued visibly by the South African achievers. The most common philanthropic activities have been limited to leaving endowments to schools or churches

attended by donating families.

Corporate giving started a long time ago in South Africa through what were initially called the chairman's funds, which evolved into corporate social investments. The current trend is for companies to give back as part of the black economic empowerment compliance mechanism.



The danger of moving from the business environment to the philanthropic one is the use of business principles and techniques in the social environment.

The quest for the return on investment becomes the quest for social impact. The energy that the business people applied to their businesses, if applied in the same way to the social sector, can be counter-productive.

The lesson that is being learnt by philanthropists is that while some principles that work in business can work in the social sector others might not necessarily be good.

There is also a cynical view that most of the big philanthropists in history were tough businessmen and they turned to philanthropy to atone for their meanness.

In South Africa the biggest question that was raised in debates last year was why the new black millionaires and billionaires were not giving back.

No clear reasons have been given why black people don't give back to their communities. However, they do give back but

sometimes not in a manner that is as visible as that practised by some of the American foundations.

Furthermore, there are people who prefer to keep quiet when they give back, heeding Jesus Christ's teaching that if you give with the right hand, the left hand must not know. They prefer confidentiality because giving back that inflates the ego could end up doing damage to the person who receives the gift. For example, in schools the concept of bursary boys can be used in such a way that it demeans boys who receive scholarships from the school.

Of course, there are others who prefer to remain quiet about their giving because it will reveal the amount of wealth they have amassed over the years.

Philanthropy is not limited only to the rich. It is possible to find a lot of acts of giving back by people in the communities that would not necessarily grab the headlines.