My life as a philanthropist began with sock puppets. Do you know what I’m talking about? Those funky looking creatures made of old socks, buttons, yarn and thread? I remember particularly enjoying sewing on cascades of yellow yarn to the head of my sock puppet—perhaps I was trying to tell the puppet’s ultimate owner a little more about its creator. Who knows? At age 7, I just really enjoyed sitting at the kitchen table with my mom and sister making gifts for kids whose Christmas mornings wouldn’t be yielding the bounty of my own.

From sock puppets, and many such similar projects to help my Mom’s work in the Junior League, I moved on to visits to nursing homes, to town clean-ups, to tutoring young kids in inner city schools to hosting events on feminism (showing my age). Throughout this journey into adulthood and definition of self I was fortunate to have my parents as role models, moral guides and cheerleaders. (My mom was a “leaguer” – Junior League and League of Women Voters – PTA and girl scout leader, and my Dad a trustee of Columbia University. I also just happened – or perhaps was drawn like a moth to the light – to attend a college in the early 70’s where launching a protest was their idea of a fun Friday night. So I embarked upon my working life determined to change the

On June 24th, 2008, TPI’s President and CEO Ellen Remmer kicked off the Women’s Philanthropy Network with an address about the power and potential of women’s philanthropy. Women, with their transformational leadership style, can achieve social change by being passionate about philanthropy as a means to self-expression, family bonding, and positive social impact. Following is a transcript of that address.

Women and Philanthropy - Transformational Leadership

Deepen Engagement. Increase Impact.

With so many opportunities for philanthropy to be truly transformational, now is the time to move.

Take a step towards more strategic philanthropy. Leave a lasting mark on a complex system or an individual life. Call or e-mail TPI to open an informal conversation: 617.338.2590 or get2us@tpi.org.

Together, we will move towards your goals.
world, which I soon discovered was harder than it looked. I took a 12 year detour into business, where I was a fish out of water, but learned enough about the market economy to appreciate its vital importance to democracy, prosperity, innovation and scale.

Fast forward 18 years – today, I am a philanthropic missionary and I am particularly passionate about women’s and family philanthropy. An unabashed optimist, I believe in their untapped potential to transform the world. What I figured out along my journey was that a life focused on investing in communities and social change is the life I want. A life focused on inspiring others to “drink the cool-aid” of philanthropy is the way I find meaning in life. It’s what gets me up in the morning and keeps me awake at night. Sometimes it begins with sock puppets, but it can begin anywhere. Where did your journey begin?

MOTIVATION AND PASSION

“Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm,” said Ralph Waldo Emerson. Philanthropy is no exception. Enthusiasm – or let’s call it passion – is that powerful emotion for an issue, cause or organization that commands your attention and fuels your desire to act. Passion is the nutrition for your vision of the future. Passion helps you persist despite disappointments and roadblocks or as Winston Churchill said, “Success is going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm.” Passion gives focus and focus begets impact.

My passions, like most people, come from my life experiences. After my Dad passed away 20 years ago, we sold most of the family’s operating businesses and my Mom and two sisters and I decided to put some of the assets from the sale into a family foundation. Our major motivation at the time was to send a message to our own kids about the responsibilities and opportunities of wealth; a message that the meaning of wealth wasn’t about accumulating the biggest amount or buying the most toys, but about what it could allow you to do in and for the world. We were thinking very explicitly about the legacy we wanted to leave and of course we were building on the legacy that our parents had passed on to us.

The experience of our family philanthropy has been extraordinary and has changed the way we see our family, its purpose and place in the world. We were lucky enough to go to a TPI conference very early on and became hooked on the idea of focused, strategic giving. Sharing a concern about the feminization of poverty, we decided to focus for the first few years on helping disadvantaged girls take charge of their lives. Eighteen years later, we are still on this quest and the journey has been remarkable. We’ve funded great organizations like Girl Scouts work in inner-city schools; we’ve helped new programs like a girls rowing and character building initiative take off, we’ve sponsored conferences and been part of national collaboratives and more recently we helped a group of agency leaders form a regional collaborative for professional development and advocacy around girls. The satisfaction and collective pride we have reaped from working together on this venture has been amazing. We have had the opportunity to define and act upon shared family values that we had never named before – opportunity, lifelong learning, networks of support - and to learn more deeply about one another’s world views. (Annie believes change comes one person at a time; Susan and I are inspired by systemic change through knowledge and networks)

And of course, the family foundation experience has also had an impact on each of us as individual female philanthropists. The influence on my mother was an extraordinary thing to watch. A woman whose life course had clearly been shaped by her times, she was the woman behind the man, who gave fractionally sized gifts to her alma mater vs. my Dad’s because she “hadn’t earned the money;” who when we first began to make site visits for the foundation, assumed that the quality of people who would be willing to work for a nonprofit at paupers’ wages would be subpar. Yet when she celebrated her 50th reunion at Barnard not too many years later her “most proud of” testimonial was the impact of the family foundation. She served on many boards, including as vice-chair of Barnard and became a true philanthropic leader working to help young people, especially young women to build a better life. When she passed away nearly four years ago, she left a good deal of her estate to various philanthropic ventures.

The experience of the family foundation has fueled my passion and ambition to promote philanthropy as a means of self-expression, family bonding, character development, civil society and just plain positive social impact.

Of course, I’ve had to practice what I preach now with my own kids – which was frankly not as easy as it was with my Mom and sisters! We did our own version of sock puppets, and I made sure their allowance was carefully divided into three jars for spending, saving and giving. As they grew up, we raised the stakes, requiring them to write letters to gift recipients and visiting a few organizations. I was thrilled when they both served on the community service committee of their middle schools. Sometimes they competed with one another which, as long as it was in service to the world was just fine with me. My son got inspired when we were on safari to raise money for a school in Tanzania. My daughter tried to top that with a fundraiser for a women’s shelter that had helped an old babysitter. When my Mom died she left each of them – and their cousins – with gifts to her alma mater vs. my Dad’s because she “hadn’t earned the money;” when my Dad passed away we sold most of the family’s operating businesses and my Mom and two sisters and I decided to put some of the assets from the sale into a family foundation.

The experience of the family foundation has been extraordinary and has changed the way we see our family, its purpose and place in the world. We were lucky enough to go to a TPI conference very early on and became hooked on the idea of focused, strategic giving. Sharing a concern about the feminization of poverty, we decided to focus for the first few years on helping disadvantaged girls take charge of their lives. Eighteen years later, we are still on this quest and the journey has been remarkable. We’ve funded great organizations like Girl Scouts work in inner-city schools; we’ve helped new programs like a girls rowing and character building initiative take off, we’ve sponsored conferences and been part of national collaboratives and more recently we helped a group of agency leaders form a regional collaborative for professional development and advocacy around girls. The satisfaction and collective pride we have reaped from working together on this venture has been amazing. We have had the opportunity to define and act upon shared family values that we had never named before – opportunity, lifelong learning, networks of support - and to learn more deeply about one another’s world views. (Annie believes change comes one person at a time; Susan and I are inspired by systemic change through knowledge and networks)
But let’s pause here for a few moments and give you the opportunity to reflect on the passions that do or could drive your philanthropy, either those that you are already taking to the bank or those passions that you feel deep in your belly, but haven’t yet had the time or platform to act upon.

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Passion is the perfect starting point. But now, what do we do about those passions? And specifically, are there ways that women do and can act upon their passions so that they are particularly impactful and meaningful? And does this even matter?

First of all, why does it matter? Well, women now control 83% of household spending and over 50% of personal wealth. Women are coming up the wage curve with 30% of working wives out-earning their spouses – twice the rate of 20 years ago. Women are becoming corporate leaders and are owning more businesses. And women still outlive men by 5.5 years, thus standing to control a huge amount of this ongoing intergenerational transfer of wealth and enormous amount of potential philanthropic capital. So by sheer numbers, women are increasingly in the drivers seat for wealth and giving.

I’ve spent a lot of time looking for differences between men and women in their giving, and while I see some differences and research suggests a few differences, for the most part I would wager that these distinctions come from diverse life experiences. So while men may have historically given bigger gifts, focused their gifts in fewer issue areas, and given to different issue areas than women as a group, I’m not convinced that these behaviors are truly gender based. However, I do believe in a few other important differences. Alice Eagly and her colleagues at Northwestern University conducted a meta-analysis of 45 published and unpublished studies on leaders in business, academics and other areas to see whether and how typical leadership styles of men and women differ. Their studies revealed just a few differences across gender, but the one that I found most compelling is that women are more likely to be transformational leaders while men are more likely to be transactional leaders. Transformational leaders are defined as “those who serve as role models, mentor and empower workers and encourage innovation even when the organization they lead is already successful.” Transactional leaders, in contrast, “appeal to subordinates’ self-interest by forming exchange relationships, based on using reward and punishment as incentives.” And in their analysis, they found that the transformational style was more likely to lead to good performance and organizational effectiveness.

I believe women have a tendency to bring transformational leadership to their philanthropy. I’ve seen it. Women draw on the assets, skills and differences of others to help them make decisions – e.g. look at the phenomenon of giving circles. Women work in partnership with grantees and recognize that true change can only happen when the populations experiencing difficulties are also part of the solution. (Fireman Scholars, Parents Survival Guide)

Family systems and succession specialist Kelin Gersick, who wrote the only piece of research ever conducted on why some family foundations successfully thrive through the generations noted: “The inclusion of women seems to have a significant impact on the grantmaking process, especially if a woman is in the leadership position… they looked for support from the group. They were more accommodating and better able to tolerate multiple agendas. They were also more inclined to inclusion across branches and generations.”

There are many wonderful examples of women as transformational philanthropic leaders and I know there are many examples in this room. I think of a group of women in Boston who have partnered with a Rwandan community to create a school for 60 girls, both Hutu and Tutsi. Not only did they raise $800k to build the school but they recruited a mentor for the headmaster and a group of retired American educators who will work in partnership with the Rwandan based group to run a teacher training institute. The school is a symbol of hope for a shattered country and a great example of partnership where undoubtedly both the role of giver and receiver are intertwined and both are transformed.

On the more political front, today we have women leaders like Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf who, in her campaign said she wanted to become president in order “to bring motherly sensitivity and emotion to the presidency” as a way of healing the wounds of war. That would be transformational, wouldn’t it?

REALIZING YOUR POTENTIAL

So how can you realize your potential as a powerful woman philanthropist and transformational leader? TPI’s founder Peter Karoff developed something we call the philanthropic curve many years ago and I think it is valuable tool for thinking about where you are in your philanthropic journey and where you might want to go.

Find your passion(s) - What do you really care about? Children? Our environment? Music? Has something touched you personally? Or does something outrage you? Inspire you? If you are passionate about something, you will persist and you will succeed. “To love what you do and feel that it matters – how could anything be more fun?” (Catherine Graham)

Take charge and create a giving plan – this is part of being organized and in control of your giving. The average American receives 230 requests/year. If you don’t take charge of your giving – it will take charge of you. Establish a budget, mission, allocation, goals. Find a giving vehicle or set of vehicles that work for you. You might want a donor advised fund at the Philadelphia Foundation where they do all the back office work and can offer due diligence on organizations in the community. Or you may be in a position to set up a foundation that is perpetual. Or maybe a planned gift with a regular stream of income to you and a charity. With a plan, you can maximize the dollars, effort and impact of your giving.
**Be a learner** – I think Philanthropy is the best graduate school in the world. It is a platform for thinking about important issues and crafting a strategy to tackle them. Whether you care deeply about institutions or issues, you can increase the impact of your contribution by learning about what’s worked, what’s failed, what’s needed, what’s new. Build on what others have done. Rely on resources like the Philadelphia Foundation for their knowledge of the community, its great organizations and potential partnerships.

**Be strategic** – consider focusing your gifts (or some portion), so that you can really add value. There will always be the “good citizen” gifts that you will want and need to make. But consider taking on one or a few issues or institutions where you can become really knowledgeable and add value. Small gifts that are carefully targeted have the ability to give you leverage, to fill in an important gap, to connect the dots. See if you can avoid the “spray and pray” phenomenon that too many donors give in to.

**Be creative** – this is your chance to be a social entrepreneur and improve our society in just about any way you choose. It’s wide open. You can support individual leaders, you can build organizations, you can be the convener of unlikely parties to address a thorny problem. You can experiment with new ideas or foster that in others. Philanthropy offers the opportunity to think differently.

**Don’t marginalize** – take a page from Emily’s List, the political fundraising group that challenges women to write a check that equals the worth of the clothes and accessories they are wearing. Women have always been great volunteers, but let’s become serious financial givers too. Think about giving out of assets.

**Think big and leverage your giving** – develop a vision for the change you want to see in the world. Challenge others to give, or join with others. “Who are you serving by living small in the world?” (Nelson Mandela) Use your power. Use your heart. Be a transformational leader.

**Be a role model and a mentor** – be willing to stand up and tell your story. This counts and it works. Think about the role models in your life and the difference they made to you. As a woman, be a role model to other women and to the next generation. For those who are mothers, aunts, grandmothers, godmothers – you can play a big role in teaching, practicing and reinforcing the love of giving with the next generation. Start family giving projects, launch a mother/daughter book and giving clubs, create a family fund – there are many different ways to do this. “What you teach your own children is what you really believe in.” (Cathy Warner Weatherford)

**THE POWER AND POTENTIAL OF WOMEN’S PHIANTHROPY IS INFINITE. ALL IT TAKES IS ALL OF US.**

* - Ellen Remmer