



## As a Family, Be Purposeful in Your Giving

By Cass Grange, Senior Advisor Associate

Along with all those wonderful photos of friends' kids from near and far, your snail mailbox and your email inbox is filling to the brim with annual appeals. We want to give; yet the barrage of requests is enough to make anyone feel like Scrooge. As an advisor to many clients who include thoughtful philanthropy as part of their plan, I regularly engage in discussions with them to help clarify their values and identify their goals when it comes to giving. The holidays present us with a perfect opportunity to have a meaningful discussion with our families about charitable giving.

A few weeks ago, I heard the author Kevin Salwen speak about the book he wrote with his daughter Hannah, *The Power of Half*. One day, his daughter noticed the irony of a homeless man begging for food on the street while a sparkling Mercedes sped past. Hannah remarked that if the Mercedes owner just gave a little of what he or she had, the homeless man would have something to eat. Upon examining their own life, the Kalwen family took some extreme measures -- they sold their home and gave half of the proceeds to a nonprofit that helps feed people in Africa. Now, my two teen boys did not want to sell our house, but it did prompt a very rewarding family discussion regarding our values and how we can purposefully give in keeping with our values and priorities.

Together we decided we'd give a set amount and asked our sons what causes they thought we should help. They both mentioned organizations where they had volunteered during the summer. Helping out at Mobile Loaves and Fishes helped "put a face on it" for our younger son. Through this effort, we accomplished one of our family goals with giving -- that we teach our children empathy and caring for others and help them connect with people they may not normally meet in our suburban neighborhood.

We like to adopt a family for the holidays, as we not only help that family in some way, but we also help connect us to them. One year when my son was about 7, he helped me wrap the gifts for the family we had adopted, whose name we received from Hospice Austin. First, my son complained that we didn't own the DVD *Finding Nemo*, and it wasn't fair that we were giving it away to someone else. Then, when I explained we bought a hand-held game for the 8 year old boy, who was dying, he wrapped the gift and said to me, "If my brother was dying, I couldn't stand it." My son's "ah-ha" moment made the whole effort worth it for me. He had developed empathy for the boy and for his family. In the act of giving to others, he became more grateful for his own blessings. That is part of our personal philosophy about giving: it needs to reflect our values as a family.

So, as you consider making gifts of time, money or goods to charities this year, here are a few things to keep in mind:

- 1) Be clear about your giving philosophy. If you know why you are giving and what is important to you, it will make it easier to say no to the requests that are not consistent with your philosophy.
- 2) Have a family meeting and involve everyone in a discussion about your values and how they impact what charities you would like to give to for the season. Stick to your plan rather than feeling compelled to give a little to everyone who asks.
- 3) Develop a giving budget. Establish a dollar amount that you are comfortable with for your seasonal giving.
- 4) Do your research. If you select a charity you are not familiar with, be sure to look up the charity at [www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org) before mailing your check.
- 5) Don't wait until December 31, 2010 to mail your check. If you plan to deduct your gift on your tax return, get it to the charity before December 31, 2010.

Lastly, don't underestimate the power of giving. By investing the time as a family to thoughtfully share your time, attention and resources with others, you will not only help those in need but you also will create a purposeful tradition of expressing gratitude and reinforcing your family values for generations to come.