

COMPASSION FATIGUE

If you are typical, during the course of a year you receive dozens of direct-mail appeals for donations. In addition, there are the regular solicitations by telephone and requests by e-mail.

Most of the causes seem worthy. They include food for the hungry, housing for the homeless, medicines for the sick, programs for disabled children, scholarships for deserving students, research for various diseases, protection of wildlife, support for religious missions, and many other needs, which thousands of not-for-profit organizations have been organized to address.

Very likely you send contributions to some of them, and perhaps you wish you were able to include still more in your charity list. However, the constant barrage of heart-rending stories about the plight of others can result in “compassion fatigue.” Three stories about suffering may evoke a strong sense of empathy, but three dozen such stories may simply numb you. Like a soldier on the battlefield, constantly exposed to the wounded and dying, you may become somewhat desensitized, and then you just feel like saying, “Enough already!”

If this is happening to you, perhaps it is time to give more attention to planning your philanthropy. Think of your contributions as analogous to going to a mall. Like impulsive buyers who purchase whatever objects strike their fancy with little regard to their overall shopping budget, some donors respond to emotional appeals with little regard to their charitable objectives. Other donors are more like shoppers who look for the best products to meet their priorities within a budget.

Emotion is terribly important in giving, as you want to give for those purposes that touch your heart. However, you will be less likely to experience compassion fatigue, if you plan and impose discipline on your giving.

That entails the following:

- Determine the focus of your giving. Even the Gates Foundation, the largest in the world, while making grants for a variety of purposes concentrates on just a few areas like world health and education.
- Evaluate the charities to which you give. You can find information about recommended Canadian charities on the website, *Charity Intelligence*, and the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) published an entire list of charities, including those whose registration has been revoked. Information about American charities is available on the websites, *Charity Navigator* and *Guidestar*. We can assure you that our organization is in good standing, uses your donations wisely, and regularly reports to donors. If your gift was larger and was designated for a particular purpose, such as an endowed fund, you can have the satisfaction of seeing what you are accomplishing through personalized impact reports.
- Determine the best way to make your gift. Writing a cheque is fine, but it may be more beneficial to give another asset, such as appreciated stock or real estate. Also, it may be more feasible for you to make a gift in the future through a will or by beneficiary designation, or currently under an arrangement that pays you income. Our website discusses these methods in detail.
- Create a charitable gift plan for the year, listing the charities that you will definitely support, how you will contribute, and what your overall charitable budget will be. Leave room for gifts for pressing needs and worthy organizations that may come to your attention in the course of the year.
- Finally, start thinking of the charitable legacies you wish to leave and the difference you want them to make. Our office of gift planning has expertise in this area and would be pleased to work with you.

By following these steps, you are less likely to succumb to compassion fatigue, and you can ensure that your philanthropy is feasible, effective, and satisfying.