

Birthright founders discuss 'giving'

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Giving: Jewish philanthropists Charles Bronfman and Jeffery Solomon co-authored the book 'The Art of Giving,' which they discussed at the Heller Zimmer Forum Monday.
PHOTO BY Max Shay/The Hoot

Charles Bronfman and Jeffery Solomon, co-authors of "The Art of Giving: Where the Soul Meets a Business Plan," spoke Monday about philanthropy in today's world.

Andrew Hahn, the director of the Sillerman Center for the Advancement of Philanthropy, mediated the discussion.

"The Art of Giving" describes philanthropy as a business, while addressing the major issues it faces. Essentially, it is a how-to guide to increase the effectiveness of philanthropic deeds.

Hahn asked Solomon to describe his most notable grant-making initiative and what defines its effectiveness. As founding president of the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies Inc., both Solomon and Bronfman support foundations in the United States, Canada and Israel that create programs to strengthen their knowledge and gratitude of their Jewish history and heritage.

Solomon said that their most notable grant-making initiative would be "Birthright," which provides thousands of young Jews with the opportunity to go on a 10-day trip to Israel to build a connection with the country and the Jewish people.

The participants are then required to answer questions about the trip at the end of their 10 days to assess the program's effectiveness, which Solomon says is crucial to its success.

The book also touches upon the dynamics between the donors, partners and the gift itself. Bronfman said that although there are 10 types of donors, ranging anywhere from the non-donor to the passive donor to the proactive donor, the motivation for a potential donor should be that to give "providing it touches his or her soul."

Solomon believes that donors give to philanthropies when they care deeply about the organization to which they are giving and that, if they do, they will continue to give to an organization. In this way, he said, the philanthropic can indeed make a difference.

"The gift," he said, "becomes an evaluation of yourself."

Bronfman also discussed non-profit organizations or, as he calls them in his book, "the partners."

"Giving money isn't the hard part. The non-profits do the incredible work, the heavy lifting. Donors need to remember that so they can work together," he said.

Bronfman discussed the difference between “old” and “new” philanthropy, explaining that in old philanthropy, the granter serves the need of the grantee.

Today, the grantee serves the need of the granter, where they are no longer donors, but rather investors.

“First something should grab your soul before you can transform it into a business move,” Bronfman said.

Hahn ended the session by asking what advice was best for graduating Brandeis students.

“Don’t accept mediocrity,” Solomon said. “Excellence is the only way to advance your values.”

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