To Bill Gates and Warren Buffett:

Bill and Warren

I honor you for conceiving and promoting the Giving Pledge and thank you for inviting me to join the list of impressive people who have already pledged to donate half their net worth to help others.

Taking the Giving Pledge comes naturally for me. I began giving my nickels to my Temple when my father explained to me that giving to help others is a Jewish tradition. Those nickels, contributed to nonprofits over the years, now total nearly $500 million. Having already given away nearly half my net worth, I plan to keep on going. I have also tried to teach my children and grandchildren how to be effective philanthropists in their own right.

Philanthropy is an unnatural act that must be learned and practiced. As my wealth has grown, so has my philanthropy and my desire for my philanthropic endeavors to make a real impact. My giving embraces the same core values that underscore everything I do. I seek to support organizations and people that:

- are totally honest and open about their intentions and results
- continually strive for excellence (always try to improve)
- know themselves well enough to treat others as they want to be treated (Golden Rule)
- establish, communicate and evaluate themselves against clear objectives within a clearly stated mission.

This approach leads most often to my supporting zealot-driven, well managed organizations waiting to foster positive change and/or to stimulate creativity.

Philanthropy should be fun, otherwise it will not be sustainable. Seeing results flow from my gifts is my greatest pleasure as a philanthropist — whether exonerating a jailed innocent or completing a Frank Gehry building, I want to enjoy my philanthropy.

I have learned that philanthropy is much more than writing a check to an arts, education, health, or welfare organization. The simple act of giving money rarely accomplishes the specific objectives which motivated my gift in the first place. It takes persistent follow-through and focus. I continue to try and help the people I support accomplish their stated objectives. I hold those I support accountable, requiring regular reports of accomplishment vs. objectives. I abhor nonprofits that live beyond their means. There is a remarkable paucity of good management in the nonprofit world. I began The Management Center to help nonprofit organizations focus on good management, goal setting and achieving results.
To maximize the impact of my giving, I look for areas that are often neglected by others. I believe in promoting a healthy democracy, broad civic participation and public policy — from the support of progressive think tanks to leadership training for public servants, to investigative journalism, ethics in government, and a democratic media.

If there is one area that is taboo for most philanthropists yet exemplifies disastrous public policy, it is our nation’s outdated, ineffective marijuana laws. A majority of Americans are ready to change marijuana laws, yet we continue to arrest our young people for engaging in an activity that is utterly commonplace. I have funded much of the movement to enact laws that give patients access to marijuana as relief for pain and nausea — and have made no secret of being one of those patients myself, using marijuana to help with pain following the amputation of my lower leg.

The catch phrases that drive my life and philanthropy include: Enjoy every day; Think outside the lines; Risk, learn and grow; Ideas are easy, execution pays off; Constantly improve; Admit mistakes, fix them and move on; Problems are opportunities; Hard work makes winners.

Take care of yourselves, Stay well and happy.

Joy, Love and Peace,

Peter B. Lewis