

Life & Arts

How to Give It: Johnny Goedhuis

The executive chairman of wine merchant Goedhuis & Co says pleasure can be a valuable motivator

Interview by Mika Ross-Southall JULY 19, 2012



Johnny Goedhuis, 63, is the executive chairman of wine merchant Goedhuis & Co which for the past 22 years ago has been running wine dinners to raise funds for charities supporting those with learning disabilities and children's causes. He is a trustee of MacIntyre (www.macintyrecharity.org), which cares for people with learning disabilities. He also supports the learning disability charity Carefree Northants (www.carefreenorthants.co.uk).

Why do you have a particular interest in learning disability charities and children's charities?

Our son Sam was born 21 years ago with Down's Syndrome, so he was our motivation. At first we were involved with children's charities but as we learnt more about the care sector we decided that would be our main focus. It's an awful thing to say but raising money for children with learning disabilities is easier because people are more generous to children than they are to adults with learning disabilities. So we support the care charities that also encompass adults.

Do you think giving time or giving money is more important?

They're both equally important. Every charity is desperately in need of money and volunteers.

Do you think charitable giving goes hand-in-hand with fundraising events such as dinners or wine tastings?

Particularly in the care sector, we discovered that it's difficult to appeal to people and tug at their heartstrings. People do not naturally feel the desire to give to these causes unless they have a connection, such as a relative with a learning disability. By adding a hook like wine or dinner, which is a pleasurable experience, it increases public awareness and involves them in the cause and then they are more likely to give generously.

Do you think a percentage of one's earnings should automatically be donated to charity?

No. What is good about Goedhuis & Co is that nearly everybody here is either raising money for their own charities or for the company's charities. I love that free involvement. Some people are not interested in charities but you can't hold that against them. It's vital that people give money, and/or time, and it's good for the soul. However, it shouldn't be an obligation – it has to come from you.

Are you an impulse giver or are all your donations planned?

Big donations are planned, small donations are impulse. If a young person accosts me in the street and talks about tigers then I'm likely to give them a small amount. I get requests from causes all the time and it's very difficult knowing when to draw a line because the needs that people have at the moment are huge.

How do you make sure the money you donate is used effectively?

I'm a trustee of MacIntyre, which is the charity where most of my personal money goes, as does most of the money Goedhuis & Co raises through events. So I see first hand that it's an extraordinarily well-run charity. Carefree Northants doesn't have a huge amount of money and what it achieves is brilliant. For any of our major fundraising events we ensure that we know the charities personally and know how they work.

howtogiveit@ft.com

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