



## HOW FAMILY BUSINESSES CAN INSPIRE THE NEXT GENERATION OF PHILANTHROPISTS

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*Storytelling can help make sense of a family's giving strategy and onboard younger generations.*

Giving, even if very informal, is one of the core activities that successful, enterprising families engage in. But one major challenge that larger or multigenerational families often face is igniting passion in younger members for the causes traditionally supported by the family.

How can you engage the younger generation? How can you preserve your philanthropic legacy even when you no longer lead any giving activities?

The typical advice for involving younger family members in philanthropy is to onboard them early on and to discuss important topics such as values, privilege and financial literacy.

But one effective - and frequently overlooked - way of sparking interest is storytelling.

Telling stories is one of the most powerful tools that leaders have to influence, teach and inspire. We're hardwired to find stories more memorable than factual statements because storytelling engages more parts of our brains than abstract language.

[Previous research](#) shows that effective storytelling:

- creates a sense of connection, builds familiarity and trust, and allows the listener to enter the story where they are, making them more open to learning;
- works for all types of learners, irrespective of age, experience or background;
- helps with learning because stories are easy to remember.

## **Do you know the story of LEGO?**

LEGO was created by an unemployed carpenter during the economic crisis of the 1930s.

His name was Ole Kirk Christiansen. When the crisis hit the small Danish town of Billund, local farmers – the carpenter's main customers – could no longer afford his work.

Ole felt under even greater pressure at the time because the economic crisis coincided with the death of his wife during childbirth, leaving him not only unemployed but also alone with four children.

To make ends meet, Ole wanted to make toys out of scraps of wood, but very few people believed in the likely success of such a venture, his family included.

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Against the odds, his wooden toys were well received, and his business started growing. But, in the early days of LEGO, Ole faced further adversity: a looming bankruptcy and, later, his factory burning down.

He didn't give up, instead reinventing the company. His motto – “play well” or “leg godt” in Danish – has guided the LEGO company through more turbulent times too, across its 88-year history.

Let's not forget that great leaders are role models in life. Even today, the LEGO Group owner family is actively engaged in the LEGO Foundation. The latter shares the mission of inspiring and developing the builders of tomorrow with the LEGO Group. The foundation is committed to re-defining play and re-imagining learning to ensure children develop the skills they need to navigate an uncertain and complex world.

Ole's story is not only inspiring for entrepreneurs or those facing difficulty in business, it also shows the power of narrative in building strength in family motivation, resilience and legacy. His story has empowered the generations that followed him in growing the business around a clearly defined purpose and story.

### **What's next?**

Effective storytelling isn't just about what's said or done. To influence others, you also need to pay attention to how you're delivering your message.

Since COVID-19, most of our interactions have become virtual, and many enterprising families have discovered how critical digital platforms are (and will continue to be) in staying connected and communicating, both within the family and with the outside world.

Digital storytelling can be useful even for those families who prefer to remain private when it comes to their giving, since they also need to be mindful that the next generation will need to know what was done – and given – to cultivate positive values in the generations to come.

More and more of these families are shifting their focus to communicating, sharing and inspiring through creating a digital storytelling ecosystem that includes their family websites or other online channels dedicated to the family, such as a WhatsApp group or a family e-newsletter. Virtual family gatherings are going to be more the norm than the exception this Christmas, and who knows how far beyond?

But digital storytelling also requires an additional effort to become truly effective - it calls for the development of a strategy.

Here are some tips and questions for families relying on digital right now:

- Who is speaking and with whom are you communicating?
- What channels are most appropriate?
- What is your budget?
- What skills and tech do you have or need to acquire?
- How frequently do you need to connect?
- How often do you review the channels you use for storytelling to ensure cohesion and transparency?

Storytelling, whether digital or not, is a powerful tool to inspire, engage and motivate the next generation to take on a leading role in your family's giving.

If this is something that you or your family want to harness, here's what to do first:

- Reflect on your own motivation for giving
- Assess the focus of your current or future giving
- Define a clear ambition for your giving

You can then begin to think about how to articulate and communicate these elements to your family.

To learn more about how to use storytelling to engage the next generation in philanthropy, you may want to read the "Purpose" chapter of the recently published [\*Family Philanthropy Navigator\*](#) book, which you can order from [Amazon](#).