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In early October 1983, the Publisher and Executive Editors of *The San Francisco Chronicle* requested my attendance at a meeting with Walter A. Haas, Jr., President of Levi Strauss & Company and Ira Hirschfield, Executive Director, Evelyn & Walter Haas, Jr. Fund.

Messrs. Haas and Hirschfield had requested that *The Chronicle* consider establishing an annual holiday fundraiser modeled after *The New York Times Neediest Cases Fund*. By then I had worked on a few start-ups for the paper and *Chronicle* executives knew that if I understood a concept, I could bring it to life – quickly, with minimal (or no) staff, and with minimal funds. They asked my opinion of the idea. I knew next-to-nothing about fundraising, but this was an excellent idea.

Ira Hirschfield said, “I will walk you through all the steps.” I said “Great. Let’s do it.” *Chronicle* management said dubiously, “we won’t be able to get this launched this year.” Ira asked, “Why not,” and said “Sure we can.” I nodded agreement . . . without having a clue of just what launching a fund drive entailed.

The results were amazing: I left *The Chronicle* every evening around 5 p.m., drove to Ira’s office, met for about one-half hour after which time I had a list of politicians to meet, social workers to call, and tasks to accomplish the next day. At the paper, we held editorial meetings to stage direction, timelines, story length, art needs, logo design, etc. This continued until the first stories were printed on Thanksgiving Day 1983. One of the most difficult parts was naming the fund. “Seasonal alliteration” was the only guideline given. After a few frustrating weeks of pondering, I turned to the Bible and found: “To everything there is a season. For every rhyme there is a reason.” The holidays *are* the Season of Sharing. Hearts open to consider others, thus the Fund was born. Because SOS is the Navy distress call for “Save Our Ship,” which echoed Buckminster Fuller’s writings about Spaceship Earth, it seemed all the more appropriate.

Evelyn & Walter Haas, Jr. Fund lead the field with \$50,000 and *The Chronicle* contributed \$20,000, along with substantial staff support and in-paper visibility with articles and ads. Because so many prominent old San Francisco families are proud to be a part of anything the elegant Haas Family does, checks began to roll in . . . and then pour in!

We had no idea what our efforts would bring. Anything over the initial \$50,000 was welcome. The first drive closed on New Year’s Eve with \$460,000. All were amazed and delighted at the intense community support. One Stinson Beach resident sent her check with a note thanking *The Chronicle* for giving her family an opportunity to “help our neighbors in need.”

I read every single letter that came in, answered every telephone call and tailored stories to respond to public concerns and the needs of the community. Within a few years, donations exceeded a million, then two million, then three million dollars. Since it began in 1983, the Fund has distributed \$100 million directly to families with one-time critical needs in nine Bay Area counties and has been one of the largest donors to Bay Area food banks, proving more than \$16 million.

No money is taken from donated dollars by anyone for any reason. Absolutely *every dollar* donated helps someone directly. I believe it is the only fund of its kind in the world, it is truly a noble effort, and it exemplifies marketing at its best.