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Could Silicon Valley rethink philanthropy?

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Laura Arrillaga-Andreessen - the daughter of a Silicon Valley real estate tycoon and the wife of Marc Andreessen, co-founder of Netscape - thinks tech titans should be more philanthropic. And she is encouraging the youngest billionaires to give away their money now.

But her mission extends beyond the tech world. She wants to expand the definition of the philanthropist to include people who give time or expertise, not just money. She also argues that philanthropy should be more professional, by borrowing strategies like research and evaluation from Silicon Valley's profit-making businesses. These strategies include using technology to make things more efficient, inventing new ways to do business and financing nimble startups.

Although her ideas are not really new, said Michael O'Neill, a professor of nonprofit management at the University of San Francisco, her efforts could be influential if they inspired donors to do more research, and more thoughtful giving.

"The ideal thing, as she argues, is that donors would be thoughtful and investigative, but all the data I've seen is that no more than 15 percent of donors actually do that," Mr. O'Neill said. Instead of researching grants, he said, people impulsively give to causes like their alma mater or a family member's disease.

The concept of venture philanthropy, coined by John D. Rockefeller III in 1969, was popularized in a 1997 Harvard Business Review article, "Virtuous Capital: What Foundations Can Learn From Venture Capital."

And giving while living and with a great deal of thought and research was Andrew Carnegie's message in "The Gospel of Wealth," published in 1889, Mr. O'Neill said.

The tech super-rich have been giving their money away for a while. Early tech entrepreneurs, like Bill Hewlett and David Packard of Hewlett-Packard and Gordon Moore of Intel, started big and influential foundations, but the tech boom of the late 1990s spawned new types of giving, like commercial philanthropic investing, practiced by the Skoll Foundation and the Omidyar Network, both started with eBay money. The eBay Foundation was formed with pre-initial public offering stock, a groundbreaking idea at the time.

The newest generation of entrepreneurs is more philanthropic while they are young, thanks largely to Ms. Arrillaga-Andreessen's work, said Jeff Skoll, eBay's first president and the founder of the Skoll Foundation.

And today's tech entrepreneurs are looking at other new ways of giving, including by marrying their professional and philanthropic activity in a way that previous generations did not, said Ms. Arrillaga-Andreessen, who teaches philanthropy at Stanford. Zynga, for example, has given \$10 million to nonprofit groups from the sale of virtual goods in its games.

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