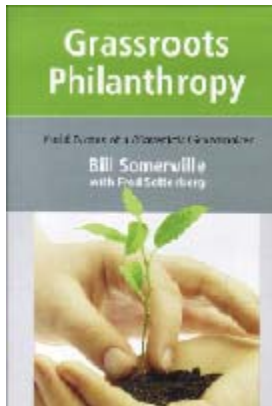


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## Book review - ‘Grassroots Philanthropy’: A practical guide cuts through red tape in charitable giving

By Paul Nyberg



Bill Somerville seems to thrive on writing checks: checks to individuals who step up to help someone in need; checks to organizations he has seen in action whose leaders are trustworthy – and visionary; and checks to seed a startup idea that, while perhaps risky, is fueled with passion to deal with hunger, literacy, homelessness or the arts.

Based on more than four decades working in the non-profit sector, Somerville’s practical approach could streamline giving and remove the bureaucratic roadblocks that make much philanthropy ineffective.

Somerville, with Fred Setterberg, has summarized his straightforward approach to fund people not projects in “Grassroots Philanthropy” (Heyday Press, 2008).

Somerville founded Philanthropic Ventures Foundation in 1991 with a vision for making things happen quickly. In “Grassroots,” he explains his “paperless” philanthropy and how PVF makes discretionary grants. A phone call or “grant making on the run,” as he defines it, means he does not sift through pages and pages of a proposals, staff evaluations or letters of approval. He simply sends “our letter of transmittal” for the recipient’s signature.

“Paperwork reductions help put everyone on the track of productive philanthropy,” Somerville wrote.

It is important, wrote the author, for donors, whether individuals or foundations, to stop reading and get out of the office to meet people. Somerville must mean it because he repeats the idea in just about every chapter.

More than 350 community foundations in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom consult with Somerville, universally known as a maverick in the industry.

The book offers some practical tips for giving away or getting money for worthy projects:

- Be a risk taker.
- Focus on ideas not problems.
- Locate outstanding people doing important work.
- Promote dialogue among groups with similar objectives.
- Move quickly.

Subtitled “Field Notes of a Maverick Grantmaker,” this 130-page book is a must-read for anyone giving or expecting to get money in the philanthropic world of 2008.

Somerville is scheduled to discuss and sign the book 5:30-7:30 p.m. May 21 at Main Street Cafe & Books, 134 Main St. in downtown Los Altos. Copies of “Grassroots Philanthropy” are available at the cafe.