

# THE HEDGEHOG

## NICKELS AND DIMES

The world of philanthropy throws up people with many talents: some are exquisite at extracting money from the recalcitrant wealthy; others can boost the confidence of those at a very low ebb; others still devise innovative schemes for solving our problems. Very few of them, however, are sign language artists like Barry Nickelsberg of the Carter Center, the charity set up by the former president.

As described on his website, Nickelsberg 'incorporates dance, mime, gesture and facial expression to convey the rhythm and emotion of the music.' (A video on YouTube must be seen.) It was all these skills that Nickelsberg used during our conversation back in December at the UBS Philanthropy Summit in St Moritz as he vividly outlined how he asks for money for the Carter Center, whose twin aims are

fighting disease and waging peace.

Or rather, he doesn't ask for money. Americans' number two fear — after public speaking — is asking for money, so 'here's my mantra: "I'm going to give you, Josh, an opportunity to make an investment in the future of our community. I feel like a broker with a hot tip. Let me tell you about the Carter Center.'" He will talk about schistosomiasis, a vile parasitic disease endemic in Nigeria, and how it kills children. "I'm not asking you for a donation — I'm offering you an opportunity to invest in the future." I don't ask for money — I lay it all out and let them decide what they want to do.'

By this point, with his performative variety of timbres, tones and tempos, I was ready to write a cheque — as have been Bill Gates and Warren Buffett, who calls his annual donation 'the best investment he makes every year', according to Nickelsberg. Like Gates and Buffett, the Carter Center sees the future of philanthropy in partnering with governments: it harnesses already extensive resources with external entrepreneurial pizzazz.

Isn't there a problem with the wealthy using philanthropy for public redemption? 'I think that's been true for time immemorial. There are people who have made money through — well, the drug cartels of Latin America created schools, they built hospitals — it's a way of trying to redeem their reputation or buy the support of the local people. Some of the early families of great wealth that were building libraries — they chose to make sure that they were remembered for more than just the corporations that they built.' This doesn't mean a charity shouldn't be careful where its money comes from, he stresses.

After St Moritz, where he was speaking, Nickelsberg was heading back to America to interpret a performance of *The Messiah*. When Hedgehog asked him how he would interpret the Hallelujah Chorus, he said he'd considered that and that if he could choose when he's going to die, it would be at the very moment that section finishes. If his good work is going to continue, we must hope that does not happen for some time.

