

In conversation with Elie Horn:

“Do good! Just do good!”

Philanthropy is deeply rooted in Elie Horn’s family. Despite his business success, he has remained modest, because “money is made to invest in poor people”.

I had the wonderful opportunity to meet Elie Horn early one morning on a video call. He looked very relaxed, sitting on a chair in his living room, wearing a sweatshirt. The first thing Horn asked me as we started our conversation, was “why do you live?” As our discussion continued, he asked me as many questions as I asked him. This encounter with Horn turned out to be a very philosophical one – and touched me much more than any regular business meeting. It was clear to me that he has thought a lot about the purpose of his life. Everything he said came across in an extremely humble and authentic way, like the fact that he doesn’t spend money on things associated with vanity or material items. He feels that would be lost money that could instead have been used for those who need it the most.

“Make money to give money”

Elie Horn’s job on earth is simple: “Make money to give money.” He is not a doctor or a lawyer, so he cannot save people’s lives with medicine, or protect the most vulnerable with the help of the law. Elie Horn is “only” a good businessman. He began to work at a very young age and founded his own building company, Cyrela Brazil Realty, which today is one of Brazil’s largest residential developers. A few years later, at the age of only 29, he was worth USD 25 million, which would now be equivalent to around USD 200 million. Today, he is among the wealthiest individuals in Brazil.

Horn’s story is incredible for someone who grew up poor and had a difficult childhood. Born in 1944 in Syria, he moved to Brazil when he was eleven years old. It was during his childhood that he understood what has since become one of his core values: the value of money. “When you do not have money, you give value to it,” he says. Through difficult experiences that shocked him, like when he saw a 2-year-old, paralyzed child in the street who was unable to do anything, or a 12-year-old prostitute, a girl who was treated like a slave by older men, he quickly understood that money could solve many problems and help many people. He also learned how money could have a positive impact on the lives of these people and started to ask himself fundamental questions about good and bad, God and chaos – and why there is so much suffering in the world, especially for these children.



The value of giving

For many years, these questions and doubts persisted in Horn’s head. It was in his forties, after his parents slowly passed away, that he finally understood the meaning of his life. His family helped him to identify another crucial value: the value of giving. His father, despite not having a lot of money, gave everything he had to charity. Horn’s grandfather had raised money for children in need. His mother also lived by this value. After his parents had passed, he wanted to pay tribute to them by doing something they had always done: helping others through philanthropy.

With a deep faith and strong values, Horn started founding and supporting many charitable organizations. To provide solutions to the events that had shocked him in his childhood, he founded the Instituto Liberta in 2016, an entity that works to combat sexual exploitation of children and adolescents in Brazil in all its forms. More recently, in 2018, he founded the Movimento Bem Maior, an organization focused on strengthening and developing collaborative philanthropy in Brazil. Over the last three years, seven other philanthropists have joined him and together, the organization currently supports the work of 74 NGOs and five collectives.

Encouraging others to engage

Today Horn spends at least half of his time talking about philanthropy. He is a sensible person and does not accept the world as it is. “There are too many bad things happening,” he says. He tries to encourage others to engage in philanthropy and constantly insists: “Do good! No matter which good. Just do good!” He does not have a policy regarding his donations in terms of the number of people helped or impact, but for each dollar he gives, three additional dollars generally come from other donors.

He does not spend money unnecessarily on himself, as he believes money is made to invest in people. “I suffered too much for lack of money to be able to throw money away. Money is made to invest in poor people.” Now, the money he makes goes to charity. In 2015, he was the first Brazilian to recommit to and surpass the Giving Pledge that he made ten years earlier: giving 60 percent of

his wealth to charity. His wife and children have always supported him in giving all that he can during his lifetime. They have themselves learned the value of giving and adopted it in their day-to-day lives. His children, for example, gave their birthday gifts to charity and continue to donate much of what they make.

Horn's passion and motivation for doing good is admirable. But this passion and faith sometimes make him unhappy. He always

pushes to do more, to have more money, to give more and to do more good. "When you are unhappy, you do more," he says. He is aware that he will not be around forever. "As human beings, we will carry nothing with us to the other world – the only things we shall take are the good deeds that we accomplished in this world," says Horn. He wants to be remembered as someone who really tried his best to do good.

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Photo: generously provided by Elie Horn