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You can't lean on your own shoulder
In praise of unselfishness

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The spoken word applies.

Ladies and gentlemen,
What songs move our nation's soul most powerfully in these difficult times and therefore sell sensationally well and by the millions? Those of Herbert Grönemeyer on his CD 'Mensch' (Man), the first songs he has recorded since the death of his wife and brother.
I'd like to begin – and end – my discourse about successful life with a quote from this album.

It's from the track entitled 'Unbewohnt' (Uninhabited):

"I get up, wander round the house,
Go to the fridge, open it.
It is cold, it is empty.
I move through hopeless space,
Talk to myself, barely hear myself,
My own radio, I switch myself off.

I'd like to understand myself,
But I don't know how that goes.
The outline is gone."

Faced with such an emotion, allow me to take you on a short journey through time. Do you remember the early Magnum ice cream advert in which a young man breaks away from a passionate embrace with a beautiful woman to rush to a condom vending machine, only to spy an ice cream machine and put his coin into that instead? And do you remember what the punch line was? "Sometimes you have to get your priorities right."

Do you remember (hopefully not from your own experience) all those self-realisation workshops after which participants' marriages promptly broke up?

Do you remember the time when people suddenly no longer wanted to dance in couples anymore so that they could wallow undisturbed and self-absorbed in their own narcissism?

Are you still familiar with the pithy sayings of Erich Lejeune ("You can do anything if you only want to!") or Bodo Schäfer ("Everyone can become rich!")?

Do you remember all those adverts that ended with claims like "Because I'm worth it"? And all those attempts to "find yourself"?

Do you ever think back to those glorious days between September 1997 and March 2000, to the glamorous months of the New Economy, when the armies of Porsches, Mercedes and BMWs parked outside shareholders' meetings made us all believe that everyone could become rich, days when 29-year-olds were given millions for nicely-packaged business plans and used the money to wallpaper the suites of their own self-aggrandisement?

Do you remember the scandalous revelations about enrichment and fraud in companies ranging from Mannesmann to Enron?

Never forget these memories, ladies and gentlemen!

Rather, file them under "Necessary swings of the historical pendulum" or "Deviation caused by existential disorientation".

The floods of August 2002 were sadly symbolic of the downfall of the "Me and my Magnum" generation. The moving solidarity that Generation Sandbag showed for the flood victims was merely the poignant final nail in the coffin of the Me Inc. philosophy, which had to be drowned in the floods of history together with all that "What's in it for me?"

Why? We could let ourselves off lightly and quote Goethe, as ever:

"Man should be noble,
Helpful and good!
For this alone
Distinguishes him
From all the creatures
That we know."

In spite of all the secularisation, we could pick up the Bible and read Moses 3:27 or Luke 18. We could also apply Aristotle's nicomachian ethics or – somewhat more fashionably – point to what Buddhism says about overcoming selfishness.

But we aren't being paid well to make life easy on ourselves. We want to dig deeper. Let us call on Friedrich Schorlemmer's aid:

"Everyone looks after himself. Everyone does his job, if he has one. Everyone remains his own best counsel. Everyone passes everyone else by, whether pushing or pushed, walking or walked. We're just passing: I you, you me."

Moral and religious demands aside, this is the dead-end into which we have allowed ourselves to be herded after the fall of first religion and then the Wall. It is an ice age for the soul, a social chill, ruthlessness and cynicism. In terms of bringing up our children, it is Erfurt.

We needn't confirm what is blatantly obvious. Of course, wealth can only be created by competition, motivation, ambition and a healthy dose of selfishness. Of course, capitalism is the only system that moves us forward. And of course it harbours the predatory elements of everyone-vs.-everyone-else, indeed needs it to bring progress about.

But it must be imbued with humanity, warmth, spontaneity and passion. Otherwise it is like German football; successful and efficient, yet somehow unloved, ladies and gentlemen.

In principle, the count-me-out mentality of a chilled society is alien to Man. You can't lean on your own shoulder, and you can only kiss yourself on a cold mirror. Business has taught us that we always work better as a team and that teamwork means often laboriously adapting to others and keeping them involved. Sport and the media have taught us that team sports are both more exciting and more successful in the long run than combats between individuals. Evolutionary research has taught us that Nature doesn't care about individuals and only the survival of the species is important. Psychology has taught us that the path to personal happiness always leads past the happiness of others or – put another way – that doing things for your family, friends or others paradoxically makes you happier than only ever worrying about your own improvement.

This all means, ladies and gentlemen, that in the long run the Me Inc. culture is destined for bankruptcy in the long term in the face of the force of Us Inc. All it takes to realise this is a little maturity and an understanding of human nature. The young, tie-less entrepreneurs of the New Economy couldn't possibly have both these attributes. I remember it so well: When we left managerial school as thirty-somethings in 1985, the only thing you planned in life was your salary, bonus, status, staff and company car. When we met up 15 years later and discussed our lives and values, these were, of course, still high on the agenda, though we were talking much more about families, friendship, fulfilment, social engagement and purpose. Take Steven Spielberg, who at a recent lunch in Berlin was asked what he was proudest of. His family came first, then the Shoah Foundation (in which he is recording the stories of the last remaining witnesses of Nazi terror in order to warn future generations about the consequences of intolerance and racism). His films came a poor third, although he is the most successful filmmaker of all time. Or take my 22-year-old nephew, who told me that it was only through being confronted with hardship and infirmity while doing community military service that he realised how privileged he was to be healthy and well-off. It isn't always easy riding solo on a ski lift. And no radiator anywhere in the world will provide you with human warmth. We need one another, ladies and gentlemen, in a truly existential sense. And not just for friendship, in school, for a team, in love, passion and for reproduction. We need the pact between parents, whose upbringing and love provides their children with a springboard into life, and the next generation that will one day care for its ageing parents. What we need in spite of all the trends towards privatising pensions is a pact between the generations, that is, the working population and retirees. If we want peace and stability in today's smaller world, we must join forces to ensure that the poorest of the poor have at very least their most basic needs met. If not, many more aeroplanes will be flown into skyscrapers and theatregoers taken hostage. We are angels with clipped wings – not only in the romantic sense, in that Man only becomes human through love.

As you can see, ladies and gentlemen, this all centres on self-interest; the force that drives capitalism and the market economy. Personally, I can only consider myself happy and successful if I do not live solely to satisfy my own interests, but at least to the same extent those of my fellow Man. So no priest needs to tell me about the rewards of the afterlife. We can reap them here and now through the immense satisfaction of stepping beyond the narrow confines of one's own cosmos and seeing

everything in perspective. It's similar to the paradox of falling asleep. The more you try to resist it, the more you are doomed to fail.

Or, to put it in golfing parlance: The perfect swing, the magical moment when everything goes right, leads away from you.

If that is so (and I could go on for a very long time), there are several lessons to learn from it. I do not want to discuss here what the state should do within our social market economy. We had plenty of that – unsatisfactory though it was – during the 2002 election campaign. This is about us as fathers and mothers, friends and neighbours, citizens and entrepreneurs with all the glorious diversity of roles this brings. And don't tell me you can hand in your inner fellow Man at company reception, or hang up your inner entrepreneur on the coat rack at home. It may simplify things in the relevant surroundings, but it will not satisfy the high demands you set yourself.

It all begins with upbringing. Quite a few children grow up in circumstances in which genuine material hardship or even existential fears are rare. They are fully secured socially, and are not confronted directly with wars that destroy and murder. Their parents are often divorced. Single-adult households dominate our cities. We have to fight to prevent a monstrous illusion growing in the hearts and minds of these children that you can live a painless, calculable life on your own. Michael Jackson has stopped enjoying himself, ladies and gentlemen. And as perfect as the avatars and virtual heroes populating digital worlds may be, they will never teach empathy, friendship, the capacity to listen or the willingness to help. They are more likely to accelerate the loss of comprehension of the consequences of violence and therefore the reluctance to act violently.

Only one generalising phrase is always right: All generalisation is wrong. The images of the disastrous flooding in eastern Germany last year graphically confirmed what the latest Shell study discovered about young people in Germany: In spite of all the influences to the contrary, they are not as selfish as expected. They are willing to cut short their holidays to carry sandbags. Three-quarters of them are active in youth or social work, environmental protection, the fire brigade or the church. So-called "youngsters" are, after all, never intrinsically good or bad, and basic human constants like compassion and a willingness to help carve a swathe through conventions and fashions whenever disaster makes us deeply insecure and forces us back into our naked existence. Heinrich von Kleist described this masterfully in 'Earthquake in Chile'.

In my passionate rally against selfishness and the Me Inc. culture, I have now moved almost imperceptibly from upbringing to non-profit work. This doesn't matter. It's where I was heading anyway, ladies and gentlemen. Each and every one of you knows from your own experience that in the long run it is more satisfying to love than be loved, to give rather than receive. This is probably also realised by all those who work for the benefit of people in need of assistance. The empirical proof of this can be found in the chapter about the magic triangle in Stefan Klein's bestseller 'The Lucky Formula'.

If you want empirical proof of the growing importance of the "Us Inc." principle, you can easily find it in the new forms of non-profit civic engagement. In the United States, for example, 93 million American citizens (nearly half the population over 18 years of age) do charity work in their spare time. Volunteers spend an average of four

hours a week on such work. Expressed in monetary terms, these hours are worth more than \$200 billion a year (cf. Rupert Graf Strachwitz (Pub.): Dritter Sektor – Dritte Kraft, [Third Sector – Third Force], p. 67)!

But Germans have also got the message and are discovering their new civic responsibilities. One in every three Germans does non-profit work helping the poor, weak and sick. And the numbers have risen sharply in recent years. Following the lively solidarity and neighbourly support of the early post-war years, our growing wealth led us to start cutting ourselves off from suffering, and delegate our solidarity to large relief organisations. Now we are returning to the principle that everyone needs to lend a hand. The slogan of Dresden's civic flood relief campaign was "Helping makes you proud".

The issues I have addressed are as varied and colourful as life itself. Everyone can find a place in one of the dedicated teams. And – of course – your own project is always the most important. It can't be any other way if you want to achieve something. Take a look at the list of deeds honoured by the German president on "Non-profit Day": providing material and practical aid for the homeless and needy; raising money from bric-a-brac sales and collecting clothes for Tanzania; helping an old peoples' home; working in a Hospice for the gravely ill; supporting traumatised women in the former Yugoslavia; adapting cars for disabled people to enable them to become mobile; collecting vitamins for radiation-damaged children in Belarus; aiding refugees and asylum seekers adjust to life in Germany; round-the-clock care for a paralysed boy ...

I find it very difficult to stop. You and I can sense that each of these projects is immensely important for both helper and helped alike. You can sense that the choice of issue is as subjective as love itself. You can sense that the world couldn't function without such fortitude, such aid. And you can probably sense – I'll come back to it later – that it shouldn't be left to the state under any circumstances, ladies and gentlemen.

With your permission, I'd like to briefly tell you another very subjective story: the story of how I – an entrepreneur and publisher – got involved in non-profit work and how immensely valuable it has become for me. After all, concrete examples are more convincing than abstract thoughts.

For precisely the aforementioned doubts about the efficacy of state action, I and more than 30 dedicated and well-known people from the worlds of politics, business and the media founded the organization Children for a Better World in 1994. What was our aim? We wanted to give children in need a home and help in the widest sense of the word – and that without red tape. We wanted the young people involved in the projects to take part themselves. And we wanted all the administrative and managerial costs to be covered so that every penny donated would go towards the aid projects.

Today, we can proudly say that we have achieved all our aims. By applying the above criteria, we have already supported or made possible more than 50 children's aid projects around the world, from a therapeutic farm for abused children in southern Germany to a large orphanage in Rwanda and a home for children with cancer in Halle. Our starting capital of DM300,000 grew into DM10 million that we were then able to donate!

Up to now, we have acted on the principle that actions are more important than words. Children for a Better World is now in excellent shape and over its teething problems. We have therefore set up a national committee of illustrious figures to organise major events like this one in June 2003: As a way of honouring young people who help the needy and creating positive role models, we have twice very

successfully held the 'Jugend hilfft' (Young People Help) awards in Bavaria. A well-known Swedish furniture chain was very enthusiastic about the event, and generously paid the cost of organising the nationwide 'Jugend hilfft' nomination campaign, while Christina Rau – the wife of the German president – agreed to become the event's patron. So early this summer, 150 young people were honoured at Bellevue Castle, the president's official residence, for their outstanding efforts. "Why all the bother?" you may ask. "Why not simply send a cheque to a major organisation? Isn't time our scarcest resource?" There is an objective and a subjective reason.

The objective reason is that we all – you and I – can use our managerial experience, our public influence and our networks to help such organisations increase their momentum. If you or I need busses for children in care, lower construction costs or annual railcards for people looking after homeless children, we can get them because we generally know the chairmen of the relevant companies and speak their language. That saddles us with responsibility, because many smaller associations could never do that. And remember: the Red Cross wouldn't exist today if Henri Dunant hadn't been concerned about how badly wounded soldiers were cared for after the Battle of Solferino.

The subjective reason for my involvement (incidentally a very "biblical" approximately ten percent of my time) is no different to what motivates hundreds of thousands of other helpers. Everything that is "non-profit" for tax purposes is extremely profitable in personal and human terms. You meet people you wouldn't meet otherwise and discover new things about people you know. You realise why action is necessary, a fact that sometimes gets lost in the everyday hubbub of cost management and process optimisation. You pass on some of the privileges you enjoy in life – and see it as just and appropriate. You feel effective and fulfilled in employing your skills and contacts. And you are deeply moved when direct contact shows you how existentially important such basic help can often be for those affected, and what emotions it triggers.

The Bible puts it succinctly (Luke 6:38): "Give and it shall be given to you".

Such wisdom renders superfluous, I believe, the debate about where altruism ends and selfishness begins. Both are inextricably linked – even to the point at which you feel bad, if you don't help. In his highly recommendable book 'The Compassionate Beast', Morton Hunt defined altruism thus:

"Behaviour carried out to benefit another at some sacrifice to oneself, and without, or not primarily because of, the expectation of rewards from external sources."

Researchers have devoted a lot of thought to the issue of altruism since its very existence appears to contradict the innate urge to do only what increases your own chances of survival. If, as Plato claims, Man is a wolf to other men, how do we explain that people are willing to help and support each other, and proclaim a "social" market economy? Is there a gene for altruism? Or are there instinctive mechanisms that enable us to react to the needs of others with behaviour that social experience can mould into altruism proper? Or is altruism merely "a particularly cunning, illusory and devilish form of self-love", as Archbishop Fenelon claimed?

We needn't care less, ladies and gentlemen. I am very happy if service for others brings us public appreciation and improves our image. The motives for helping are always highly complex (and often triggered by experiences of actual need in our personal surroundings). So who cares, as long as people are helped? Over the millennia, our human genetic structure has clearly realised that we are all better off in

a global sense and stand a better evolutionary chance of survival if we look after each other socially. Given the structurally high level of unemployment in this country, helping and all forms of social engagement must finally become a part of our understanding of human "work"!

In this context, I'd like to briefly talk about what are known as "charity ladies". Personally, I could send most of them bouquets of thanks, be they the wives of famous politicians or prominent businessmen, or among the countless women who organise charity events at garden parties or golf clubs. They deserve recognition because they are the ones who direct the spotlight of public attention at difficult issues. They are the ones who pepper pleasant evenings with a purpose and raise large amounts of money with green fees, raffles and auctions, money that help non-profit organisations survive. Three cheers for so much social effort and the people behind it! Germany needs much more of it!

The work just mentioned is based on personal involvement, good ideas and the most important gift we have to give: time. In 'The Prophet', Khalil Gibran writes, "You give very little, if you give of your property.

Only when you give of yourself do you give properly."

As infinitely gratifying as direct aid is, many of us simply do not have the time and therefore can't multiply it in wondrous fashion. For these people, donating money is just as important, and the work must then be "outsourced" to paid experts. The US is ahead of us in this respect too. There, the proportion of income donated to charity is about three to four times what we give. The average German household donates DM500 a year, a figure that has remained very stable in recent years, even though disasters have shifted the recipients. Our religious tradition is apparent from the fact that more than 60 percent of all donations are made in December.

The Catholic relief organisation Caritas had an interesting and difficult experience. An earthquake in Chile made 300,000 people homeless, but there were no dramatic pictures. The usual call for donations netted DM200,000. Shortly afterwards, "only" 25,000 people lost their homes when a volcano erupted in Colombia, but a shocking photo of a girl in the mud was beamed around the world – and DM11 million were raised. Nothing unlocks wallets faster than the sight of existential need.

The German Central Institute for Social Affairs (DZI), which together with the German Charity Council acts as a kind of MOT for charities, estimates that about 20,000 non-profit organisations in Germany are genuinely and actively collecting money. What variety, what fervour, ladies and gentlemen! As fundamentally important as the SOS children's villages, UNICEF, the St. John's Ambulance Brigade or the International Red Cross, don't forget the smaller charities when looking for a worthy cause to donate money to or organise a company fundraiser for. Small is beautiful – not only when SMEs compete with big corporations!

And if you want to do some lasting good and at the same time write yourself an epitaph in the best sense of the word, then endow a project or an organisation. Set up a foundation to tackle the issues you personally hold dear, ladies and gentlemen. Whether it's €100,000 or \$21 billion like Bill Gates, donated anonymously or to great public fanfare, out of thanks for a happy life or frustration about wayward heirs, we could certainly use the answers to the odd question about purpose as well as a little immortality. After all, your last shirt doesn't have any pockets ...

Think about the examples set by successful entrepreneurs and donors like Rockefeller and Guggenheim, Körber and Bosch, Otto and Mohn. I myself have had the great honour of joining several large foundations as an active member of the

German Children and Youth Foundation, and I can confirm how effectively young people can be encouraged to act responsibly. Operative foundations can "move mountains", as Reinhard Mohn says. And whether the aim is to "relieve all kinds of suffering" (as it is for Robert Bosch) or promote the "wellbeing of Mankind" (as it is for Rockefeller), "Foundations are pioneers on the road to an immediate, spontaneous, decentralised, efficient and varied intertwining of entrepreneurial dynamism and public service" (Roman Herzog in 'Handbuch Stiftungen' [The Foundation Handbook]).

Of course they need to be just as well managed as our companies – but that's something we've mastered, haven't we? They have to be transparent, achieve their aims in a responsible manner and be accountable for their actions. If not, they become self-serving toys. But if they perform well, they can become "a kind of bulwark against both a weariness with responsibility and pressure for greater state control," plugging "the gaps in which the state cannot or perhaps should not even get involved" (Joachim Fest in 'Die großen Stifter' [The Big Donors]).

And if you're worried about the bureaucracy or legal matters, contact the 'Stifterverband' (German Charities' Association) or the Bertelsmann Foundation, which runs two large-scale, very helpful donor education programs, one in cooperation with the Rockefeller Foundation for European and American donors ("The Philanthropy Workshop"), one particularly for donors in Germany.

Winning is no fun on your own! Involve your company with all its might in your work for others! You'll be surprised by the knock-on effects such action has.

Consumers and business partners respect and love you even more. 42.8 percent of Germans prefer to buy from companies that publicly engage in social projects (w&v 13/1997). Your employees will be even prouder to be allowed to work for you. When in doubt, top-notch potential employees choose you. Local authorities are happy to have you, and more kindly disposed towards you when required. And if you get it right, the business in which you earn your money gets an important boost.

What does this all mean? Corporate giving – that is, simply transferring money without reference to the company, its mission or surroundings – is passé. It does not have a multiplier effect and has no truly credible effect on a brand.

Corporate social investment, corporate citizenship and corporate volunteering, on the other hand, are "in" because of the close, authentic link with skills and your other activities. So let's do it like the big boys – only more flexibly, personally and faster!

Just like Coca-Cola, Africa's largest employer, which is using its core advertising and distribution skills in the fight against AIDS. Or Merck, which distributes medicines or sells them at knock-down prices in selected poor countries. Or UPS, which is putting its logistics experience to good use in Kosovo. Or IBM and its Reinventing Education program. Or Henkel and its MIT project. MIT stands for 'Miteinander im Team' (Together in a Team), and represents the sum of the financial and conceptual support companies provide to volunteer work by their staff.

What did one supervisor say about the employee whom the company supported in helping renovate a school for children with learning difficulties? "The man has never been this happy to work for Henkel. And his children tell him they'd like to do an apprenticeship at Henkel. What more could a company want? Quite apart from the positive image such 'good neighbourliness' generates in the immediate vicinity of Henkel headquarters." I need only quote the title of the book from which that statement comes: "When everyone wins ..." (p.71).

You'll be amazed what effect such action has on the way employees treat one another and you, indeed on the entire corporate culture. If you play your cards right, such projects can bring your company a lot of know-how about trends and new markets. Micro-loans are a useful and innovative tool in this respect. Exciting and socially responsible projects operating in areas allied to those of your company are given small loans and left to get on with it. Additional funding is only discussed once the initial loan has been repaid. Under ideal circumstances, this generates a win, win, win situation: decent interest rates, realistic market tests and positive social effects. But don't let us forget ourselves, the managers and owners, among all this corporate optimisation. The example of the as yet small Children for a Better World demonstrates the enormous momentum the transfer of managerial know-how and contacts from for-profit activities can generate when employed for non-profit purposes. Let me give you another example, this time from a very traditional organisation: the WWF, the world's largest conservation organisation. For years, I have had the honour of sitting alongside tremendous entrepreneurs and scientists on the WWF Germany's presidium and council, and I can't tell you how fruitful the cooperation between ourselves and full-time professional conservationists is. The oft-misused basic principle of synergy that $1+1=3$ truly applies at the WWF, ladies and gentlemen. Whether we are planning our presence at the EXPO or building a national park centre, optimising project management together with Boston Consulting or talking to bankers about how best to invest the foundation's capital, large non-profit organisations need professional managerial know-how. And there's nowhere I can help more efficiently.

I'd like to give you one last example that deserves my utmost respect and shows how personal tragedy can have a positive effect. When his son Felix died of intestinal cancer, my colleague Hubert Burda reacted like anyone else in his position and locked himself into a cycle of endless grief. After all, there is nothing worse than losing one's child. But he eventually emerged again and set up the Felix Burda Foundation, which uses very emotive means to encourage people to get check-ups for possible intestinal cancer and thus protect themselves against what is today avoidable. Nobody in Germany could have moved so many famous people into giving testimony, made so gripping print ads and TV adverts, and got them as widely distributed as Hubert Burda. It's a classic case of for-profit expertise being used to help others, a principle that in this case has already saved many lives.

If there is one thing you take home with you from my long list of good reasons for doing good, let it be this: Given the already catastrophically high tax burden in many countries, the state must not be left to take us under its bureaucratic wing from the cradle to the grave, ladies and gentlemen. There is too much we can do more efficiently, pluralistically and better. And we can deal with extremely important individual issues that the state in its focus on majorities could never cover. The privately-organised third sector, which already employs 8 percent of the workforce in a country like Germany, is the future when it comes to easing suffering and need. Let us take up this challenge! And let us demand in return that the tax relief on donations and foundations in many European countries is increased dramatically (not reduced), ladies and gentlemen. Every euro not paid in tax can create three times as much in genuine aid!

In the 19th Century, many people cast off the straightjacket of religion, which promised rewards in the hereafter, if we did good in this life. In the 20th Century, we

lost all hope that ideologies like socialism could produce generalised happiness. After the fall of the Wall, all that remains is the conviction that competition, meritocracy and capitalism are the best recipe for healthy and successful coexistence on this planet. That and the consensus that the market economy based thereupon must be a social one.

However, it must not be left to the state and its minions alone to shape these social components. It is up to all of us to give capitalism a soul and help it become as humane as possible. That means everyone in his or her own area for their very personal goals and their own way out of very individual interests and motives. Altruism and sympathy take many forms, whether non-profit work or donations, endowments or corporate citizenship.

Let us take John F. Kennedy at his word: "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country." Let us give capitalism a humane face and therefore reduce the threat of further misguided terror! Let us set a good example to our children! Let us ensure that Germany wins gold medals not only for engineering or making cars, but also for fast, efficient and human aid wherever it is needed, ladies and gentlemen!

And let me end my discourse on unselfishness as I began; with Herbert Grönemeyer, who can so brilliantly express contemporary German sensitivities:

"Man is called Man
Because he errs and because he fights,
Because he hopes and loves,
Because he empathises and forgives,
Because he laughs, because he lives."