

Q: You are widely regarded as a trailblazer. You've already succeeded in so many different arenas, yet you continue to take on more every year. Where do you get your boundless energy?

You know, I think I was just born with it. I've never been a person who likes to sit still for very long. The older you get, the harder it is to stay in shape, so I exercise seven days a week and try to stay active year-round. I hike in the summer, ski in the winter, and do all kinds of things in between. I love a good challenge, and I try to stay on my feet. There are a lot of entrepreneurs like me, who don't like being in boxes, and I think that has continued to be one of the driving forces behind a lot of the things I do. I don't like being penned in.



Q: Who or what have been the greatest influences in your life?

In many ways I've modeled myself after my mother, who was always involved in so much. As a kid, I went along with her when she volunteered, and it just became a part of life. I remember her taking me to what is now Easter Seals, and how excited I was the day I got to crank letters through the postage machine. [The experience] also gave me the opportunity to work with disabled people, which I think made me look at things very differently.

Q: You've joined a handful of other great philanthropists, including Warren Buffett and Bill and Melinda Gates, in committing to giving away the majority of your wealth during your lifetime. Can you please explain how you arrived at such an important decision?

Warren Buffett and Bill Gates started an organization called The Giving Pledge last year with the realization that there were a whole lot of people who were philanthropic, but who might need peer support when deciding how and where to donate. They also thought they could encourage billionaires to become role models for others who are inclined to give. I was eager to join because I wanted to meet those folks and knew I could learn from them. I've also found that it's easier to make the money than it is to give it away right. We, as a group, can afford to do things that most people cannot, but with that comes a high level of responsibility. I have no qualms about giving all my money away, but I want to make sure it's done in a way that is truly impactful.

Q: How do you go about choosing a cause or organization to support?

I'm a bit of a risk-taker, so I sometimes seek out organizations that are underserved or projects that are off the beaten path. No matter who you are, I believe you have to look to the future, so I try to find ways that [my support] will help not just now, but 25, 30, 40, even 100 years into the future. I don't think people want handouts; they want opportunities to work, to preserve what they have, and to learn life skills. I always keep that in mind.

Q: You recently created a \$100 million company, Reditex, with the mission of developing early-stage biomedical science programs and making Texas an international hub for biotechnology. Please tell us about your passion for this field, and why you think it's so important for global advancement.

There's a big gap in getting work out of the lab and into a format that venture capitalists can invest in, so I created Reditex as a means of filling that void. Scientists will tell you that, until you have someone who'll put some money into their research, it's not going anywhere. The reason for the gap is that the failure rate is so high, so most philanthropists simply won't take that level of risk, and traditional grants often run out before the research is commercially viable. Scientists refer to this gap in funding as the "the valley of death," because that's where so much research dies. We have many medical schools in Texas, but so much of the research being done just isn't seeing the light of day. I want Texas to be a hotbed of venture capital investments, and I want people to know that – if they want to invest in life science – this is where they need to be.



Q: The guiding principal behind the Lyda Hill Foundation is “Science is the answer.” Can you please explain why this idea has become so central to your philanthropic life?

I truly believe that every issue our world faces – poverty, disease, climate change, or war – can be successfully approached in a scientific way. Whatever our problems are, science can help solve them. Even things that people don’t conventionally link to science, like crime and other social issues, can be examined in a scientific way. I also think that science has so much to teach us – and it is often the one “truth” about which people can’t argue.

Q: You have served a leadership role at Southwestern Medical Foundation for nearly two decades and were instrumental in guiding the publication of *Perspectives* magazine. Why have you continued to support the organization?

I’m practical. I love and need to see results, and Southwestern Medical Foundation helps UT Southwestern deliver them in spades. It has created thousands of jobs, produced great science, and pushed the boundaries of technology over and over again. It is a wonderful part of our community and one of the best medical institutions worldwide. You never know what you have at home until you travel, and I’ve traveled quite a bit. We have a jewel here in Dallas, and I want more people to recognize it.

Q: If you could have the opportunity to solve one problem related to health and medicine, what would it be?

I guess it would have to be cancer, which has touched my life in a very personal way. I was diagnosed with breast cancer and had my first mastectomy 33 years ago, and my family has lost a number of people younger than I am to the disease. And, frankly, cancer impacts everyone in some way. It is such a complex disease that I also think that when we find the answer to cancer, we’ll find the answer to a lot of other things.

Q: You are a lifelong athlete and a vocal advocate of physical fitness. Please explain why you feel so strongly about exercise?

Science tells us that exercise helps you live longer; it’s as simple as that. When you’re fit, disease comes later in life and is less likely to take you down. And, beyond that, exercise is one of the things that makes you feel good about yourself, particularly in light of all the dietary challenges that Americans face. I also believe that our attitude about aging has a lot to do with how we age, and there’s a large segment of the population that needs a change in attitude. It’s not the number of facelifts; it’s the number of workouts that is going to make the difference. You’re given this body, and what you put in is what you’re going to get out.

Q: You created the Volunteer Connection in our community years ago, which promoted volunteerism throughout the Dallas-Fort Worth area. What motivated you to start the organization, and what was the philosophy behind it?

Everybody can volunteer; everybody can contribute. It’s just a matter of figuring out what organization fits your priorities. Volunteer Connection really was created to solve a problem. In a mobile society like ours, there are a lot of people who want to volunteer, and a lot of agencies that need the volunteers, so we wanted to find a way to put them together. I initially just set out to prove that it could work, but it was so overwhelmingly successful that I didn’t need to prove anything. The model eventually was replicated in 70 cities across America. Although the original Volunteer Connection is gone now, the need is still great, so we’re creating a new organization – Voly – that will use social media to help people connect with each other and with volunteer opportunities. We need to reach young people and make them realize that the most fun you can have in life is to give to others. The real rewards come from what you give, not from what you get. It’s an old saying, but anyone who has spent any time volunteering knows it’s true.

Q: What do you think the future holds for you personally?

I’m so excited, because there’s so much to do. There’s so much to learn. They say the older you get, the more you get like you – and I think that’s definitely the case for me. I’m getting to explore things I’ve always loved – science and medicine. This is the next chapter in my life. The first, when I was young, was the learning chapter; and then I had the entrepreneurial chapter, when I concentrated on building businesses; and now I’m lucky enough to be in the philanthropy chapter.

Q: How do you feel about being honored with the Charles Cameron Sprague Community Service Award?

Being recognized by your peers is always the most special honor of all. I’m delighted that I’ve identified projects that people have wanted to be a part of through the years, and I’ve been fortunate to have led organizations that people have wanted to join. If you run in front of the band fast enough, you’ll look like you’re leading it! You have to get out there early! It is particularly wonderful to receive an award named for Charlie Sprague, who was a great leader. I’m also moved to be in the phenomenal company of all those who’ve received this wonderful honor ahead of me.

