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Apollo Group Inc.  
Attn: John Sperling  
4025 S. Riverpoint Parkway  
Phoenix, AZ 85040

Dear Mr. Sperling:

I'm a musician, artist, and writer, and one of my current projects is called "Make an Artist a Millionaire." The primary method of the project has been to get one million people to donate a dollar. The purpose is to collect and invest the million, enabling me to live off the interest and to achieve the ultimate goal: to pursue my artistic endeavors without the need for a day job. It has been slow going but not unfruitful: collecting \$167 over the past 4 years means it will only take me another 23,948 years to reach the goal. Not counting inflation, of course.

How would you like to help me become a millionaire? This is not an investment opportunity in the strictest sense, but a request for what I consider seed money. Why would a businessman like yourself, who has brought yourself up to where you are today, be interested in something that could be seen as a handout? Because it wouldn't be a handout.

For almost thirty years I've had a job. Since the age of 13 I've tried many kinds of work: in offices and restaurants, on ships, out in the field as a photographer. I've also tried working hard to build a career in a single field and doing what you're supposed to do while working for someone else. But helping someone else pursue their vision seems mostly to be about making them wealthier. Even if it were going as planned--with advancement, raises and increased respect—it's still five days a week sucked out of my creative life. As Tony Robbins says, the definition of insanity is to keep doing the same thing over and over and expect different results.

Currently I work in a city with a high cost of living in marketing, an undervalued and disrespected profession, for a below-average salary. Were you to make me a millionaire (or even some percentage thereof), I would be in a position to develop my work in two fields that offer little to no compensation: music and writing. With the demise of record companies and publishing, the onus for making a living at what they are best at is on the musicians and the writers.

In reading your autobiography, it's clear that you're committed to helping people create opportunities for themselves. The fine print is clear: you help people to create their own opportunities, you don't do it for them. You might say "If you can't make a living from music maybe the music's no good, or you need to try harder at the business side of it." Well someone in business wouldn't be faulted for not being a good painter, right? Outside of the creative field, no-one is expected to have a second job to support their primary work. Whether in the corporate world or the art world, the business savvy are those who rise to the top, not necessarily the most talented, and not those who contribute most to society in a non-material way.

It's an unexplained phenomenon that positions in business yield fantastic financial rewards and those in creative fields are vastly undervalued. This is simply another part of the System to beat, and I'm not looking for a shortcut, but instead a David looking for a better sling to use against Goliath.

This phase of the Millionaire project is called "400 to 1," which is an optimistic expression of my odds of becoming a millionaire. I'm writing to every person on the Forbes 400 list not as a social or political statement, but because wealth at a certain point is superfluous, both as a reward and compensation. Successful individuals often support institutions and causes important to them and invest capital in start-up companies—why not invest in an individual? (As capitalism replaced feudalism and aristocracy, so patronage went the way of the dodo. Aristocrats never have gone away though, just their patronage of individuals.)

An earlier draft of this letter had a lot of detail illustrating my particular circumstances and how these ideas have played out. Instead, I thought the ideas themselves might resonate more with you, and sound less like a sob story. Nonetheless, I'd be happy to share them with you in conversation, as well as show you some of my work. Indeed, please consider this letter as the first statement in that conversation.

Best

Dan Nelson