

# EXECUTIVES WITHOUT BORDERS

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It's normal to consider top business executives and nonprofit workers at completely opposite ends of the social responsibility spectrum. Negotiating an I.P.O is a far cry from setting up a health clinic in rural Uganda, right?

Well, for the last five years, Robert Goodwin, CEO of the nonprofit organization Executives Without Borders, has been working to change such misconceptions.

The core mission of ExecWB is to get business people involved in solving the world's greatest humanitarian challenges, shaking up the way that companies view corporate social responsibility. By linking experienced leaders with community projects around the world that are in need of business and consulting skills, ExecWB promotes partnerships that can maximize the impact and scope of philanthropic efforts.

"We're looking for the best nonprofits that are out there, and seeing how we can add resources to make them even better," Goodwin says.

This system differs greatly from the traditional ways that many companies choose to approach social responsibility, like donating large chunks of money or sending volunteers to do manual labor.

Though the inspiration came from one of Goodwin's classmates at Harvard Business School, ExecWB originally established headquarters in New York City. Now, however, Goodwin's moving the organization back to Boston.

"I'm planting a flag," Goodwin says, "This is home."

The ExecWB methodology emphasizes relationships, and not only between NGOs and business professionals, but also between established executives and members of the younger generation who have “a lot of fire in their bellies.” Goodwin felt Boston provides the perfect breeding ground for the organization’s future successes.

“There are so many amazing young professionals and students around here that we can inspire into our framework,” Goodwin says.

Jeffrey Pelletier, recently appointed Program Manager for ExecWEB, is a perfect example. Only 23 years old, he discovered Executives Without Borders last fall. After reaching out to ExecWEB, he connected with Goodwin, and ended up applying his talents and passion this past winter in Honduras, where he worked with one of ExecWEB’s partners, Central American Medical Outreach, to document and share their successful model of sustainable community development, an experience he found much more rewarding than the average mission trip.

“The concept of ‘giving’ is evolving,” Pelletier says, “I think Executives Without Borders is a little ahead of the curve, but I think we’re pushing the envelope in a good way.”

ExecWB volunteers are uniquely capable of providing not just solutions to many humanitarian problems, but in some cases, taking the problem and turning it into an opportunity.

“We’re business people at heart,” Goodwin explains. “At the end of the day, the way to get rid of poverty is through job creation and sustainability of investments.”

For an example of what exactly this means, take one of ExecWEB’s most recent projects, a collaboration with CSS and Haiti Recycling, called Ramase Lajan (a phrase which literally means “Picking up Money”).

Since the 2010 earthquake, cholera outbreaks have devastated communities, spread by the overflow of polluted water from the country’s clogged canals. The culprit behind the canal obstruction: plastic.

Instead of sending money to fight cholera or deploying volunteers to help pick up the plastic waste, ExecWB wants to help Haiti develop a system to help itself. Through the development of a network of independently owned and operated neighborhood plastic collection centers, the goal is to create jobs collecting, crushing, and transporting plastic to Haiti Recycling’s headquarters in Port au Prince.

“It’s going to change the mindsets of Haitians everywhere, in that plastic is no longer going to be trash, it’s going to be a commodity,” explains Pelletier, who will be traveling to Haiti this month to support the project, “And once you change that mindset, it changes the whole game.”

Turning a serious issue into an opportunity for economic growth, harnessing business expertise as a base for changing the world: those are the specialties of ExecWB. But Goodwin also acknowledges that one of the organization’s most important messages pertains to its core belief in the potential of every person to bring something important to the table.

“What is your talent?” he asks, “If you’re an artist, be an artist. If you are a social media person, be a social media person. Someone who’s a writer, be a writer. Find a way to leverage what it is you are inherently good at, and then find organizations and causes that need your help.”

By providing an opportunity for corporate culture to ascend into the sphere of social responsibility, ExecWB creates a catalyst for change wherein everybody wins.

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