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New ways to give a hand

Philanthropy is not just for wealthy business people or big corporations

VERITY EDWARDS

AUDETTE Exel does not like to preach about corporate social responsibility or how simple it can be for businesses to contribute to international development programs.

But the 2012 NSW Telstra Businesswoman of the Year says philanthropy is not just for wealthy business people and big corporations. "Sometimes it's the smallest businesses that are the greatest contributors, it can be the little ones that are the heroes," Exel says.

"It's knowing your purpose and understanding that business is a tool you can use in a lot of ways."

Exel has had a wide and varied career since leaving her native New Zealand while studying at university, shaping her beliefs about corporate contributions to development and aid projects.

While studying law with an interest in human rights, Exel travelled to Australia to compete in a skydiving championship more than two decades ago. She broke her knee while competing and had to finish her degree at Melbourne University, exposing her to a new country, forcing her to become independent and introducing her to a completely different society.

"Suddenly I'm at Melbourne University and I'm sitting at the cafe with people who drove their own cars," she says. "I worked as a commercial cleaner through uni. I

other worlds including power and capital."

With a plan to change the world for the better, Exel took a job as a lawyer doing bank transfers, and moved into the financial world in Sydney and then Hong Kong. With Bermuda a hub for Hong Kong's publicly listed companies to store assets before the handover to China, Exel found herself working in banking on the island tax haven.

She then served as the managing director of the Bermuda Commercial Bank and was chairwoman of the Bermuda Stock Exchange for two years in the mid-1990s.

At the time the World Economic Forum elected her as a Global Leader for Tomorrow.

Exel moved back to Australia and, in recognising a higher purpose in business, created the ISIS Group, a corporate advisory firm that channels its funding into the ISIS Foundation.

In deciding to establish the ISIS Group, Exel had spent time looking at what philanthropy meant, how companies donated and fundraising options. While most companies continuously give to a particular cause or program over a long period, Exel thought there must be other ways for them to become involved in philanthropy.

"There's a whole donor-driven



RENEE NOWYTARGER

Audette Exel says sometimes the smallest businesses are the greatest contributors to philanthropy

not having long-term funding," she says.

In setting up the ISIS Foundation, which works with communities in Uganda and Nepal to provide health, education and other development programs, Exel pioneered a new funding model.

Instead of relying on donations, she structured ISIS Group so that the successful corporate consultancy would channel all of its profits into the ISIS Foundation. The group shares administration and overhead costs, meaning 100 per cent of any external donation goes directly to development.

"What I'm trying to do is inspire people and show that it's possible to run great businesses and inspire social change at the same time," she says. "There are so many slices of the cake, from pro bono work to us being a funding enterprise, or people wanting to

could also partner with a non-profit. It will enrich your life beyond measure."

Exel says the corporate world is changing as younger generations with different attitudes to saving and contributing move up the ladder. While she says the global financial crisis and a downturn in the world economy have meant there is little fat left to trim or give, corporations are being smarter about how they help.

Exel will discuss her thoughts and funding models at next week's Nexus Youth Summit in Sydney.

The summit's co-chairwoman Amanda Miller says generation Y corporates are realising they do not need to amass great fortunes to donate to charities or development programs, or wait until they are middle-aged to contribute.

"What's happening with generation Ys is that they can have their cake and eat it too, they can be in business and help," Miller

it's environmentally sustainable? It's about how you can do business and do some good."

The Nexus Youth Summit will bring together 250 young philanthropists, entrepreneurs and corporates in a bid to create connections, focusing on ethical and sustainable projects.

"There's a lot of young people and business people that we come into contact with, and there's only so much money that you need," she says.

Miller says while corporate philanthropy with the aim of contributing to social development is slowly changing shape in Australia, it has already taken off in the US. There are more than 1100 benefit corporations in the US, or B corps, which use business to solve social and environmental problems. For a company to be awarded B corp status it must meet a range of criteria on how it can help society or operate in a

such a system, there are entrepreneurs making a difference in a similar way to Exel.

Melbourne's Feast of Merit cafe owner Elliot Costello donates all profits to not-for-profit group Y-Generation Against Poverty's youth education programs in Africa, Asia and Australia. People can eat at the cafe and know that they are helping a cause.

Costello is the son of Tim Costello, the chief executive of World Vision, and has philanthropy in business at heart.

One project supported by the Nexus Youth Summit is the Nappy Collective, where several businesswomen with children established a nappy collection service for unwanted and unused nappies, to be distributed to families in need through charities.

The Nexus Youth Summit is being held from tomorrow until Tuesday in Melbourne.

It will have a focus on improv-

WORKOUT

Jobs market on rise

RECRUITMENT and talent management firm Hudson says hiring optimism is at its highest level in 18 months.

Hudson's Employment Trends report has found the number of employers looking to increase headcount in the final quarter this year rose to 23.9 per cent, the highest level since the second quarter of 2013. It is a 2.7 per cent increase on the previous quarter and is the highest rise in nearly four years.

Each mainland state held positive hiring intentions, and intentions improved in seven out of 10 professions.

Hudson Australia executive general manager Dean Davidson says hiring intentions are about improved sentiment.

"Over recent weeks, we have seen improvements in a number of indicators of employment conditions and our research shows significantly more employers are looking to hire than to fire in the final three months of this year," Davidson says.

He says there is an increasing need for front-end transactional lawyers in private practice, and for sales, marketing and communications professionals.

The report found 60 per cent of hirers believe there is a talent shortage, with nearly 90 per cent saying that sourcing the right talent is their biggest challenge.

Push by freelancers

A STUDY on the rise of freelance workers shows 30 per cent of the Australian workforce, or 3.7 million people, are sourcing their own jobs, across all professions.

Freelance jobs board Elance-oDesk says freelancers contribute \$51 billion in earnings to the economy, and more generation Y and baby boomers are likely to freelance compared with younger generations. The study found 59 per cent said access to technology made their job easier, 64 per cent said social media was drastically changing



Dean Davidson

seen 25 per cent of observers being given permanent positions on the boards they sat in on for their year.

More than 35 not-for-profits have signed up for next year's program, including National Parks and Wildlife, Cure Cancer, the Australian Chamber Orchestra and the Garvin Institute of Medical Research. Spaces are still available.

Corporate supporters, including the Commonwealth Bank, McKinsey and Credit Suisse, will also play an integral role in funding the program, and participants receive training through the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

Philanthropy Australia, company directors and the Jewish Communal Appeal are strategic partners and are driving the program's growth.

Applications for participating not-for-profits and observers close at the end of this month. Details: observership.com.au

No room for egos

SMALL-BUSINESS specialist John Corias, a senior partner of MAS Accountants, says many companies can avoid failing in their first few years if they spot warning signs and act.

Corias advises small businesses to leave emotion and egos behind, and not get too attached to start-ups.

"The ego can shroud judgment and can cause even the most sensible people to make stupid business decisions," Corias says. "When clients come in with a business or business idea that they are too personally attached to and are set in their ways, we have to give them the tough love speech. Take a step