

# DON'T THINK ABOUT IT... JUST DO IT!

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## 1. What are your thoughts, in general, on charitable giving?

I was very fortunate to be brought up in a family where giving was a given. My parents and grandparents were not wealthy by any means - they were working class people - but they were, and my parents still are, people who would 'give you their last penny'. From a very early age it was simply part of our lives to have charity boxes around the house, to understand that there were many people less fortunate than us and to give where we possibly could, whether in money or in time. There was nothing pious or righteous about it - it was simply a way of living, and it was also more fundamentally about a generosity of spirit which I believe is key to a better quality of life.

## 2. Is your giving personal or corporate or a combination of both?

It's a combination of both. On a personal level I have particular charities that I give to on a regular basis - usually because they are close to my heart and because I want to make a difference. At home we always have the kind of charity jars and boxes that I grew up with - the amounts we collect in them might be small but it's important to me that my children have also grown up in an environment where giving is part of life.

On a corporate level giving is an integral part of our business for many reasons.

## 3. How do you give to charity: monetarily, your own time as a volunteer or your specialist skills?

I make regular financial contributions to my chosen charities and I also give my time and skills in particular to Bowel Cancer UK. I have been involved with BCUK since one of my closest friends was diagnosed with bowel Cancer in 2009. It was devastating. She was the same age as me and had 2 young boys, the same age as my two younger children. She battled for 20 months but during that time discovered BCUK and we both became involved in raising money and more importantly awareness of the need for screening and early diagnosis to prevent other people finding out too late and losing their lives as Rosi did. She

inspired me to continue this work and I have been involved in raising the Charity's profile and their work in NI, promoting corporate support in particular.

## 4. What types of causes do you favour and why?

There are too many to mention but I give to a range of charities from the medical ones like BCUK to children's charities like NSPCC as well as some that focus on human rights and women's rights in particular.

## 5. Are there specific charities or causes that you give to regularly? How do you choose which to support?

There are so many worthwhile charities that I struggle to choose sometimes but I tend to choose causes that are close to my heart and that I feel passionate about - that way it's very easy to give.

In Edwards & Co we choose a charity of the year because it is simpler to focus on one big one and we keep a little secret reserve in case something arises in the course of the year that we really want to give to - but don't tell anyone!

## 6. Do you believe that companies and individuals have a duty to help others? If yes, why?

I think it is vitally important that giving is an integral part of society - both as individuals and at a corporate level. Altruism is something that benefits everyone - both the giver and the receiver and to that extent it is not an entirely selfless thing. Corporate Social Responsibility is an in phrase and I believe there is a danger of it becoming a box-ticking exercise but what we've discovered in Edwards & Co is that people actually really like to give! You only have to practice the habit of a random act of kindness for a few days to discover how good it makes you feel and this applies at a corporate level as well. The personality of the organisation benefits, whether it's a firm of lawyers like us or a manufacturing business - giving, generosity, kindness - whatever it's named - benefits the

organisation. In Edwards & Co there's also an added benefit - we use our charity projects for a dual purpose - as well as raising money for a particular charity, we also use the fundraising activities as a team-building initiative. The best example of this was last year when we raised £19,000 for the NI Hospice and one of our main projects was to set up and run a Hospice pop-up shop in Belfast. Our staff - from the partners to the cleaner - helped collect second hand clothes, spent their lunchtimes steam-cleaning and pricing clothes, arranging shelves and learning sales skills over a period of weeks culminating in two days in the shop. It was one of the best team experiences we've had in years. The firm also benefitted from the publicity and the charity benefitted from the funds raised.

## 7. What is your message to business people who may be thinking about becoming more involved in strategic philanthropy?

Don't think about it - do it! There's so much to do and everyone can offer something but being strategic is important and knowing where your money's going and how it's making a difference to people really helps.

## 8. Giving Northern Ireland was set up last year to champion Philanthropy. Why do you think it is important that there is an organisation that helps businesses and individuals think more strategically about giving?

People, and companies, sometimes need to be persuaded of the benefits of giving and need to hear positive stories and experiences to encourage them. Once they've decided to give, they often need help to point them in the right direction and to find a good match for their own ethos and culture. They often need guidance in how to maximise their giving. For all of these reasons organisations like Giving NI are crucial and can really help to achieve what philanthropy is all about for me - making a difference to people's lives.