

Giving a reason to create wealth

Discovering the joy of giving motivated Allan English to return to work and create more wealth to give away. **Greg Johnson** recounts the successful businessman's journey to creating a \$20 million private ancillary fund.

Transformational processes are the focus of Allan English's giving. It's a fitting priority for the Queensland businessman, whose discovery of serious giving over a decade ago sent him down a much richer path, both personally and professionally.

English had achieved modest wealth due to the success of his hospitality equipment finance business, Silver Chef, by the year 2000. As the business began to hit a growth ceiling due to finance availability, he took some time away to volunteer and started asking questions of himself.

"I started to ask myself why I was working so hard to make more money; what was I going to use the money for?" he explains. "I still lived in the same old house I had lived in for 25 years, I wasn't into big boats or anything like that, so it became a question about why I wanted to make more money and I really couldn't come up with the answer."

Opportunity knocks

Around the same time English realised he was donating a reasonable amount of money per year, but had little idea what impact was being achieved as a result of his donations. It was then that a proposal from Opportunity International arrived which would act as a catalyst for English's philanthropy.

Despite having no history with the organisation, the request for a \$10,000 donation was well targeted. Being in the business of first-world finance, supporting a microfinance project in East Timor naturally appealed to English.

"A report came back which said that 40,000 people would be moved out of poverty over a five year period as a result of that project, and that sort of hit home for me," he says. "I thought 'imagine if you could do that every year, would that give you a reason to go back to work and overcome these funding issues?'"

"I decided it would," adds English. "So I hired someone to take over my volunteering stuff and I went back to work."

English's return to the boardroom saw the company unlock \$13 million in finance within 12 months, grow 600% over the following six years and float on the Australian Stock Exchange.

"I found a purpose; now I had a purpose to go back to work and create wealth," he explains. "It

was almost like I had a partner, which was my philanthropic activities."

Given its transformative impact on his own journey, it's unsurprising that Opportunity International continues to feature in English's philanthropy. He provides pro-bono office space for the organisation's Queensland operations and has funded a \$75,000 seaweed farming project in West Timor through the organisation.

Getting into serious giving

English's giving has ramped up in recent years, with the launch of the English Family Foundation in late 2011 an important milestone. Endowed with \$20 million in Silver Chef shares, the foundation is

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looking to distribute \$800,000 - \$1 million annually.

The foundation's three core focuses are: global poverty, with the aim of funding one million people out of poverty by 2020; south-east Queensland; and social innovation. English says he prefers to fund in the \$20,000 - \$50,000 range, but will support multi-year funding at that level.

"I like to be in that smaller end, as I feel that that's the meaningful stuff," he explains, "particularly with some of the smaller charities where you can absolutely make a big difference with \$20,000."

Tackling the tougher funding areas

English is all about funding areas that others won't - whether that's leadership training, business development or just more difficult issues. He names mental illness, migration, end of life and gay and lesbian/transgender issues amongst his areas of philanthropic interest.

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He has given community services organisation



Philanthropy has allowed Allan English to transition from business success to personal significance.

Sunny Kids \$75,000 over three years to fund a combination of business planning and project delivery.

End of life care organisation Karuna is another nonprofit he is deeply involved with. In addition to providing his time as a board member and advice, he has given \$50,000 towards a new strategic plan, new direction and implementing better board selection processes.

Giving a true gift for the giver

While philanthropists - and even fundraisers - often only speak of major giving in hushed tones, English wears his philanthropic activity proudly as a badge of honour. Giving has been a source of great joy to English's life - a revelation he hopes

to spread to other wealthy individuals after being named Queensland Community Foundation's Philanthropist of the Year in June.

"The more active I am in supporting others to achieve their goals and objectives the richer my journey becomes," he explains. "It's a rich way of living. I call it the movement from success to significance: from financial success in a business sense to having more significance in my life because of the work that we are doing."

"I think the only way we can get people who are creating wealth to see philanthropy as a worthwhile enterprise is if we start talking more about it and promote some of the benefits that can be gained from it," he adds. "Then it can be seen as a more enjoyable alternative than tying \$400,000 up on a boat which sits on the water and gets used twice a year. Hopefully we can encourage them to do it a little bit different."

Greg Johnson

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