

The Global (Corporate) Citizen

Charity doesn't have to begin at home. Learn how attorneys and business executives are using their expertise to improve the world

BY JOANNE CRONRATH BAMBERGER

When Mona Clayton approached her supervisors for their advice on finding a project on which she could hone and develop her leadership skills, she didn't know that she would find herself halfway around the world, involved in one of the hardest ventures she'd ever accepted. But she didn't bat an eye when her employer offered to send her to Cambodia for two months as part of an international pro bono project, even though that meant time away from her paying clients.

In 2005 Clayton, a forensic accountant and a partner at PricewaterhouseCoopers, took a two-month break from her usual duties and traveled to Phnom Penh to work with a nongovernmental organization called Hagar International, a group that gives refuge to women and children who have been abused in human trafficking schemes and provides them with job training to start new lives.

Notwithstanding demanding careers and the long hours typically required to climb the corporate ladder, increasing numbers of professionals around the country are electing to spend months in exotic and foreign locales, as Clayton did, as a way of becoming more connected with the growing global professional community they find themselves inhabiting.

Traditionally, the pro bono work of professional firms has trended toward providing local services to those who could not afford to pay for them. But as

firms and corporations have expanded their presence around the world, they're looking more closely at what it means to be global citizens, providing and supporting efforts to become involved in parts of the world where they are newcomers.

Clayton put her usual work temporarily on hold so she could provide her financial expertise—which many here have access to and take for granted—where her services could have a greater impact, an opportunity that also would allow her to work on developing her own leadership skills. Clayton's trip to Cambodia was part of a PricewaterhouseCoopers-sponsored program called Project Ulysses, a corporate philanthropy project developed by the mega-accounting firm with two goals in mind: to give back to the global community and to create opportunities for increased leadership experience among its partners.

Profitable Advice

Clayton spent eight weeks in Cambodia working with Hagar Design, the business arm of Hagar International, providing business and consulting advice to help Hagar Design increase its profits for the handmade products it sells—the products that help fund Hagar's broader mission to help women and children.

"We helped them determine the best price to sell their products at a



Lending a Hand

While international humanitarian pro bono efforts like Clayton's are growing, some firms are also providing expert assistance to foreign governments still in their infancy, such as the government of Kosovo.

Today, Kosovo's capital city of Pristina is a bustling city center, awash in new construction and outdoor cafés filled with fashionable 20-somethings. But only a few years ago it was a city rocked by devastating and deadly conflict. As a newly formed autonomous region on its way to becoming an independent nation, Kosovo

Traditionally, pro bono work has tended toward providing local services.

needed assistance in building a government where there wasn't one before, and some young lawyers were willing to provide that help.

The law firm DLA Piper and New Perimeter, a nonprofit affiliate of the firm, have been providing assistance with a variety of worldwide pro bono legal

profit," she says. Today, a few years after her experience, she can see the fruit of her labors. "Just a few months ago, I found one of Hagar Design's bags at Whole Foods."

Aside from helping Hagar figure out the financial models that would help advance its goals, Clayton and others provided training on basic business practices, such as how to price merchandise according to the cost of materials and how to communicate as a business team.

Professional and philanthropic experiences aside, spending an extended

amount of time in an exotic locale can be life altering on other levels, as well.

"Almost every day in Cambodia was a sensory experience of one kind or another," says Clayton. "The city of Phnom Penh, with its motorized scooters kicking up dust amidst young boys and monks in flowing orange robes walking along the sidewalk, [seemed] a bit like the Wild West."

As a result of Clayton's involvement with Hagar International, she decided to remain connected to the group by becoming one of Hagar USA's board members.

efforts, including their ambitious Kosovo Law Reform Project. This program was created after requests from the United Nations and the U.S. Department of Justice for DLA Piper attorneys to aid in drafting laws and creating a framework for the nascent Kosovo legal system.

DLA Piper attorney Sara Andrews was part of a team that spent four months in Pristina in 2006 and 2007, helping the Kosovo Ministry of Justice to draft the laws that would create the Kosovo judicial and prosecutorial systems. Andrews says the experience

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was particularly challenging in a way her usual legal work might not be, because she was always aware of the fine cultural line they were walking with their advice.

“Our goal was not to impose our [legal] system on their country. Our goal was to help them develop their own legal system based on the norms and values and legal history there,” Andrews says. She and other team members worked hard not to be American-centric in their advice, knowing that their ultimate goal was to help create a legal framework based on the Kosovars’ own legal history and social norms.

But why take so much time out of building her budding legal career to help create a legal system that could take years to get off the ground? Large law firms are notorious for demanding long hours from attorneys as the price of advancing up the ladder to partner. A relatively young attorney, Andrews says she saw the Kosovo program

as an opportunity to gain the kind of substantive legal and leadership experience she might wait years to get in her daily law practice—experiences that could help her in her professional goals. As a result of her experiences, Andrews traded her position as a law firm associate for one as the program manager of New Perimeter, and now she helps to direct and choose new international pro bono efforts in which other DLA Piper attorneys will participate.

A Different Time, Different Priorities

Although individuals gain a variety of skills from these experiences, why do firms like PricewaterhouseCoopers and DLA Piper support these efforts? One expert says it’s just smart business in today’s world.

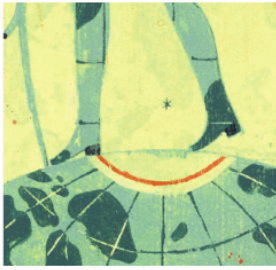
Ellen Mignoni, a senior vice president at APCO Worldwide, a public affairs

Should Your Company Join the Global Pro Bono Fray?

Professional service firms and companies that haven’t established corporate pro bono-type programs should consider doing so, for a lot of reasons, according to Ellen Mignoni, senior vice president of APCO Worldwide, a public affairs and strategic communications firm.

As businesses become more connected to the ever-growing global marketplace, having such programs is essential to being a good corporate citizen and to attracting and retaining new talent. But before embarking on a corporate philanthropy program, Mignoni suggests examining the following:

1. Be clear on the reasons for starting a pro bono or philanthropic project. What does the corporation/employer hope to accomplish?
2. Will this really help your recruiting efforts and improve employee retention? Have current employees expressed interest in becoming more active in volunteering their time? Could such a program build employee support for the employer?
3. Is there senior-level support for a program?
4. Are the programs that are being considered consistent with corporate goals?
5. Are there ways to combine a pro bono program with employee advancement opportunities?
6. Will the programs be “fun”? For corporate-sponsored pro bono activities to succeed, they need to reflect the heart and soul of those participating.



“The money most of us spend on Starbucks in one month could transform the world,” says the creator of Project Artemis.

and strategic communications firm, says large firms and corporations have increased their philanthropic presence in the global community because doing otherwise isn't an option.

“Corporate responsibility is just a part of doing business in today's global environment,” Mignoni says. Plus, she says, if companies and firms want to attract and retain qualified young professionals, these are the types of programs applicants want to be involved in and want to see potential employers embrace. Many of today's professionals in Generations X and Y expect potential employers to show their philanthropic colors, and if they don't, job seekers will look for job opportunities with companies that share their passion for corporate responsibility.

Making a Difference

Finding a way to make a difference for people in developing nations doesn't always mean making a commitment to live abroad for months at a time. Some professionals are finding ways to reach out and provide critical assistance by giving those in struggling regions a chance to come to the United States to network, learn and take skills back to their own countries.

The Thunderbird School of Global Management has developed just such a program. Project Artemis, created in 2005, brings women of Afghanistan to the Thunderbird School's Arizona campus for business training and mentoring, providing them with skills to reestablish the thriving business communities lost under Taliban rule.

Barbara Barrett, a member of Thunderbird's board of trustees and one of the creators of Project Artemis, was inspired to create the program as a result of serving on the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council, a public-private partnership

that involves Thunderbird as well as the United States Agency for International Development. Barrett developed the program because many Afghan professional women were stripped of their right to work and earn a living after the Soviet invasion and under Taliban rule.

“The women of Afghanistan have an instinct to be natural entrepreneurs,” Barrett says. She believed that with just a little assistance from Project Artemis, a handful of women could help rebuild their country.

By coming to the United States, participants gain opportunities they might not get if they were being trained in their home country. During their two-week stay in America, the Afghan women make on-site visits to successful businesses, forge one-on-one mentorships and attend MBA-style classes. As for the results, Barrett says, “One woman in the first class ran for parliament, one now runs a company with over 500 employees, and one is providing microloans for other women to start their own businesses.”

Although Barrett was hesitant to specifically name those involved in the Artemis Project, because of potential threats to these women when they return to Afghanistan, one participant, Rangina Hamidi, was nominated for a CNN Hero Award in 2007.

One of the truly amazing things Barrett has learned from her Project Artemis experience is how sometimes a little effort can make a huge impact on the lives of people around the world.

“The money most of us spend on Starbucks in one month could transform the world,” says Barrett.

A little time and a little money to transform the world? With that information, it wouldn't be surprising to see more companies taking on new international pro bono projects. ☛

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