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The Benefits of Giving Back

For more than a decade, not-for-profit organisation The Australian Charities Fund has been the architect, driver, and thought-leader of workplace giving.

By Catherine Gibson

Jenny Geddes, CEO of workplace-giving experts The Australian Charities Fund (ACF) believes that workplace giving delivers on so many of those elusive cultural fundamentals that business-leaders often struggle with, such as staff engagement, motivation, and creating a sense of purpose at work.

With an impressive line-up of top employers not just embracing workplace giving but becoming its cheerleaders within the business community, there is currently growing momentum within the giving movement at work.

ACF has been there since the beginning, playing an instrumental role in getting a tax ruling changed in 2003 to make workplace giving easier—allowing employees to give direct to charity through their payroll and receive the immediate tax benefit. Since

this time, the not-for-profit has continued to play its part as a driver and thought-leader.

Many businesses engage in some form of socially responsible activity, from a newsagent sponsoring their local netball team through to a large corporate delivering a raft of initiatives. While any contribution to the community is a good thing, particularly as business needs a healthy and productive society to consume its products and services, Jenny suggests there's a simple way for businesses to realise the full benefit.

“It’s reasonable for organisations to expect a return as they would for any other investment, but often employers aren’t engaging one of their biggest stakeholders and advocates—their employees,” she says. “What we’ve seen with successful workplace-giving programs is that when employers

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partner with their staff to achieve social impact, it’s transformed from being ‘something the company does’ to ‘something *we* do’—which has an enormous impact on employee pride.

“ACF has extensively researched this sector. Whilst we always knew workplace giving would generate a great outcome for charities, what we’ve learned along the way is that it’s a fantastic tool for business, particularly in regard to their relationship with staff. We know that employee morale goes up if you’re a workplace-giver. We also know that you’re going to work harder for the organisation because you really believe in what it does. As a result, your sense of purpose at work also goes through the roof. Increasingly, prospective staff also have an expectation that their new employer will be socially responsible, so workplace giving is a highly effective initiative that attracts and retains talent. These are all things that business-leaders are looking for.”

Online employment marketplace SEEK has taken the workplace-giving concept and made it its own. Reflecting its brand’s ‘disruptive’ mindset, SEEK re-launched its program last year with a highly creative campaign that shows ‘doing good’ can be fun as well as rewarding. SEEK renamed its giving program ‘Small Change’ and called on staff to donate just a dollar a week. The campaign included decorating the office kitchen with signs showing how making a small change like giving up just a third of a cup of coffee will make a big difference.

Nearly 60 per cent of its 750-strong workforce are now signed up to the program, and with the company matching their donations dollar for dollar, it delivers significant funding to its 10 charity partners. Beyond the ongoing financial support, charity partners also benefit from SEEK’s expertise—it recently hosted a career-skills workshops for students from the Cathy Freeman Foundation.

SEEK co-founder and CEO Andrew Bassat sees the ‘Small



Andrew Bassat, CEO and Co-Founder, SEEK Limited



Launch of One Million Donors (from left): Richard Murray, CEO, JB Hi-Fi; Kelly O'Dwyer, MP; Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull; Jenny Geddes, CEO, ACF; Greg Hutchinson, Founder, ACF.



SEEK delivered ‘Small Change’ brownies to employees’ desks

Change’ program as an integral part of SEEK’s culture and says the collective impact of these donations is a source of great pride for his workforce. It is his belief that all organisations, big or small, can do their bit.

“Workplace giving is one way companies of any size can contribute to the community,” he states. “It involves staff personally, and enables a company to connect with charities in a meaningful way, as the impact of donations can be measured and subsequently shared with those involved. For smaller companies, aligning with smaller local charities offers a great opportunity to engage their employees and makes a real difference in the communities in which they operate.”

ACF was created by a group of successful businesspeople and leading philanthropists. The organisation’s early years were focused on establishing workplace giving in larger corporates. After 10 years, ACF is now reaching out to the vast network of small-to-medium businesses who employ two-thirds of Australians, while continuing to help larger corporates realise the full potential of their programs.

Joining ACF as CEO in 2013, Jenny brings over 20 years of marketing communications and PR experience, much of it in senior positions at Sony. “After seeing firsthand the difference corporate support can make to charities, I was drawn to workplace giving as there is enormous potential for growth,” she says, “particularly as it has the ability to strengthen every area of the community.”

Realising it needed a big idea for working Australians to get behind, in 2014 ACF created the One Million Donors campaign with a goal of seeing one million Australians donating through workplace giving by 2020. Launched at Parliament House by the Hon. [now Prime Minister] Malcolm Turnbull MP, business-leaders were urged to support the movement, do good for society, and in the process strengthen their company reputation through workplace giving.

As well as giving ACF a crystal-clear focus, the campaign is also a rallying cry to the business community. With an estimated 156,000 workplace-givers in Australia, Jenny admits there is some way to go to hit the target, but firmly believes it to be achievable.

“A groundswell of support is building for workplace giving, and we believe it will reach a tipping point where it becomes a ‘must have’ for Australian businesses no matter what their size. We’ve created hundreds of programs for all different sorts of organisations, each tailored to suit the company. However, the trait we’ve recognised in all of the most successful programs is strong leadership. Employees respond when their leaders walk the talk, and we’ve seen that it’s these CEOs who reap the business benefits that come with strong, positive workplace cultures.”

This is echoed by Andrew (of SEEK), who says, “Workplace giving is a simple way for all employees to support charities they care about and to collectively have

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a greater impact in the community than any individual could alone. CEOs will see the benefits of contributing to the community through enhanced staff engagement and a workforce that is proud of their employer.”

ACF believes every employer should be able to offer workplace giving to its staff, so it has developed the *DIY Workplace Giving Guide*. The guide is perfect for SMEs wanting to set up their own program, and is available from ACF’s website along with other free resources and inspiration. Larger organisations usually engage consultancy advice to develop a tailored program.

“Whilst there is an initial investment to set up a program,” Jenny concludes, “once this is done, it’s easy to run. Employees typically become regular donors, which is brilliant for the charities as they can rely on that income each month, allowing them to focus their energy on delivering programs and services rather than diverting it into costly fundraising campaigns. What a magic formula for the community!” •

For more information on The Australian Charities Fund, go to australiancharitiesfund.org.au or 1Mdonors.org.au. Alternatively, call (02) 9024 8630.

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