

# Going the Extra Mile: Globalising Generosity

 TRANSFORMING BUSINESS

by Peter Heslam and Eric Wood



**Greed is still making the headlines. But in this article, Peter Heslam and Eric Wood introduce a new worldwide initiative to stimulate generosity and an entrepreneur who is going the extra mile.**

**T**he hotly debated question of tax benefits for charitable donations brings into sharp focus the issue of generosity – are donations generous only to the extent to which donors derive no material benefit for themselves?

Generosity may always be difficult to talk about, but periods of economic recession make it especially challenging. Yet this is precisely when the needs of the needy are most acute. It is of some encouragement, therefore, that although overall giving declines in recessions, giving from people of faith increases.

Recent research also reveals that the giving of money and time (volunteering) by religious people is disproportionately high, not only to religious charities but to non-religious ones. Should, therefore, the mounting anti-religious movement succeed, the charity sector would likely implode.

The fact that this movement shows little sign of success globally provides no room for complacency. While the giving level of the 'faithful' is relatively high, its average is below the tenth prescribed in the Hebrew Scriptures. And the fact that the poor give proportionately more than the rich means there is vast disposable income amongst the devout that is withheld from charitable causes.

Although fundraising is becoming increasingly professionalised, there are no clever formulae that can liberate this wealth. Giving is not about equations and incentives. Nor is it about being confronted with need, as the story of the Rich

Man and Lazarus in Luke's Gospel illustrates. It is ultimately – as demonstrated in Luke's contrasting accounts of the encounters of the rich young ruler and Zacchaeus with Jesus – about a spontaneous response to the grace of a lavishly generous God.

At a summit of the Lausanne Movement in Cape Town in 2010, this response inspired the launch of a campaign to encourage a global culture of Christian generosity. The Global Generosity Network is now establishing resources and local networks, helped by leading entrepreneurs.

Such entrepreneurs understand that wealth distribution relies on wealth creation – their business thinking and practical skills generate wealth for the common good. But they want to engage their hearts, not just their head and hands. They therefore not only *invest in*, but *give to*, social causes, motivated by encounters with a self-giving God who demands no return.



**The poor give proportionately more than the rich**  
*The Widow's Mite, Alexandre Bida, 1874.*

▶▶ Their example demonstrates that thrift and generosity go together.<sup>1</sup> It also shows that liberating generosity is not only about liberating funds, nor even about liberating others, but about our own liberation. The heart of the matter is the matter of the heart.



Namdeo Maharaj  
CEO of Analytical  
Technologies

This was the discovery of Namdeo Maharaj, a young engineering graduate from a poor background in Trinidad and Tobago in the Caribbean.<sup>2</sup> The last of nine children in a devout Hindu family, an encounter with Christ in his late teens led him to dedicate his aptitude for chemistry and business to God for the betterment of humanity.

The result was his founding in 1996 of Analytical Technologies (AT), which tests and treats environmentally hazardous waste from the petrochemicals industry. In doing so, the company has broken a government monopoly and leverages Namdeo’s expertise in chemistry to help preserve the environment, provide employment, and support charity.

Having become Trinidad’s leading commercial laboratory, AT has allowed Namdeo to emerge not only as one of the most successful technology entrepreneurs in the Caribbean, but as a dedicated philanthropist. His company gives a minimum of ten per cent of its profits to charity and the amount it has given each year has increased at a greater rate than its profits. The projects it supports extend beyond Trinidad to India and Africa. They involve the care of orphans, community projects, and helping people from persecuted minorities to create their own livelihoods.

Namdeo has also founded Samaritan Outreach Ministries International, an organization that helps working people use some of their annual leave to serve overseas. As a user of this scheme, he teaches leadership to indigenous people in remote, impoverished jungle areas of Guyana, to help them escape poverty through earning their own livelihood.

But Namdeo is modest about his charitable work: ‘I’m not saying I’m like Mother Teresa and have renounced all physical and material things for my faith’, he says. And he insists his business and philanthropic achievements do not derive from his good strategic management: ‘The way things work out is not a result of my brilliant management skills but God making things possible.’ He is also keen to stress that giving is not without its rewards: ‘I believe that as we give, so it is we receive’.

A strong sense of call underlies his commercial and charitable activities and it keeps him asking ‘What is God’s plan for me?’ Because his education and experience is for a greater purpose – serving God and people – he wants to be a good steward of what God has given him: ‘I am responsible for that and I would not want to waste it’.

Herein lies Namdeo’s liberation and that of all entrepreneurs like him. Despite the challenges of growing and managing their businesses, the knowledge that their businesses and wealth are not ultimately theirs but God’s keeps them from becoming ensnared by material concerns. In rendering all they have back to the God they say they worship, they put their money where his mouth is and their heart where his treasure is. ■

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Notes

- 1 Peter Heslam portrays John Wesley as a model of thrift and generosity in *Transforming Capitalism* (Grove, 2010), and Bill Gates and Warren Buffet as examples of venture philanthropy or ‘philanthrocapitalism’ in *FiBQ* 10.2.
- 2 Namdeo Maharaj is a prize-winner in the Pioneers of Prosperity business competition organized by the SEVEN fund. He is also a respondent in the Belief in Enterprise study funded by SEVEN and directed by Peter Heslam and Eric Wood, introduced in *FiBQ* 14.4.