

# PHILANTHROPIC ENTREPRENEURS TACKLE GLOBAL PROBLEMS

**As government tightens its finances, it becomes even more important that entrepreneurs embrace philanthropy, so that their skills and resources can be used to address social problems. We talked to one such philanthropist, Rino Solberg - winner of Business Worldwide Magazine's CEO Awards 2017 in the categories of 'Most Responsible CEO and Forestry Industry 2017' - about why it matters.**

## What makes an entrepreneur embrace philanthropy?

We like to believe that business is all about making a profit. However, for many involved, it expresses a need to solve social or technological problems, and business is just one route to achieving that. And that's exactly the kind of perspective entrepreneurs, or 'philanthropreneurs' as they are now called, take into just causes.

In 2014 joint research by Newcastle, Exeter and Strathclyde Universities on the transition to, and nature of, entrepreneurial philanthropy, suggested that business people liked to use their money and skills to improve or solve social problems. In general, they preferred to give their time and money to encourage recipients to help themselves.

The researchers also argued that more case studies of philanthropreneurs could encourage others to follow suit, as well as equipping them with useful knowl-

edge. We decided to talk to one business

innovator turned philanthropist, Rino Solberg, about his professional history, and what his project - Better Globe Forestry - is all about.

## Can you tell us about your personal and professional history?

I was born in 1944 in Horten, a small Norwegian town. My father died in an accident when I was two years old, so I have worked to support myself since I was ten. In 1963, I enrolled in the Air Force and studied engineering for five years through distance learning.

In 1968 I abandoned the Air Force to go into business. I started an electrical shop, which, by the time I'd sold it ten years later, was the biggest in town. By then I was ready for greater and more international challenges.

In 1974, while still running my electrical shop, I invented Unislip, a grinding machine for gate valves and acquired patents for it in 12 countries. I built companies in Norway, USA, Germany and

Japan, and had agents in 20 more countries. I sold the company in 1987 after having successfully run it for 13 years. Today, probably 70-80% of all nuclear power stations in the world feature my Unislip machines.

Since 1972, I have conducted more than 1000 training courses and public seminars, written ten books, published five magazines, and I have established over 20 companies in several countries.

I've also had some failures and it has been useful to learn from these. Five of the smaller companies I started went bankrupt and in 1989 I personally became bankrupt. I have made money, lost it, and then regained it. I have carried out business and travelled to more than 50 countries.

I believe I have lived a full, rich life, and many things have been made possible through positive thinking, persistence, and a lot of luck. However, some years ago everything in my life changed.

## What happened?

By the time I was 60 I wanted to do something more with my life - to make a difference.

My wonderful wife, Julie, who I met in Norway in 1977, was born in Uganda. We have travelled to Kenya and Uganda regularly since 1979 and have had businesses there for many years.

In 1991 we started an NGO called Child Africa to help sponsor children through school. Child Africa celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2016.

In 1994 I worked as a consultant, training companies to become certified to ISO 9000 series quality standards. I was then personally invited by the President of Uganda, Yoweri Museveni, who I met during a business gathering in Norway, to start quality management training in Uganda. I accepted his invitation, and in over ten years I trained and helped approximately 100 of the biggest companies located there to become certified to ISO 9000 series quality management



standards.

As a result of working in Africa for many years and witnessing the poverty and struggle of the people there, this led us to consider how we could use all our knowledge, skills and energy to improve life for the African people.

So, in 2004, we decided to tackle the biggest goal we could think of, poverty and corruption in Africa. It was ambitious, of course, but an important goal nonetheless.

## How did you decide to tackle the related problems of poverty and corruption?

I don't believe in charity, except for special needs and catastrophes, because in all my years in Africa I have seen too much aid money being misused as a result of corruption.

I strongly believe in self-help and to encourage entrepreneurship. An approach based on self-help gets to the core of dignity and sustainability.

To succeed in our goals we knew we had to attract people on board, people who could not only help build a movement, but also benefit themselves. Better Globe Forestry Ltd was established in Kenya in 2004. After two years of research we found the right tree to sell. Then, in 2006, we started Better Globe AS



in Norway, with the aim of selling trees with a buyback deal to finance tree planting in Africa – a form of crowdfunding effectively.

The pilot lasted for 12 years and ultimately proved to be an effective method to eradicate poverty through self-help.

**So how did it work?**

There are three elements to the project.

Firstly, large-scale tree planting. Deforestation and desertification are one of the biggest threats to our world today. In the next 50 years or so, all suitable farming land is likely to have disappeared and, consequently, the farmers too. Large-scale tree planting is important for the environment, but additionally trees will help poor farmers make more money, both in the short and long term. Our vision therefore, is to plant as many trees as there are people on this planet.

Secondly, we are microfinancing agriculture. 70-80 % of the people in Africa are poor farmers, surviving on less than \$2.00 a day. Our aim is to enable those farmers to make money through effective business techniques. Microfinancing helps kick start this process.

Thirdly, educating children. We aim to teach school children the importance of tackling corruption through publishing and distribution of a free children’s magazine called “BINGWA” (Champion) and we also need all children to have access to free primary schools.

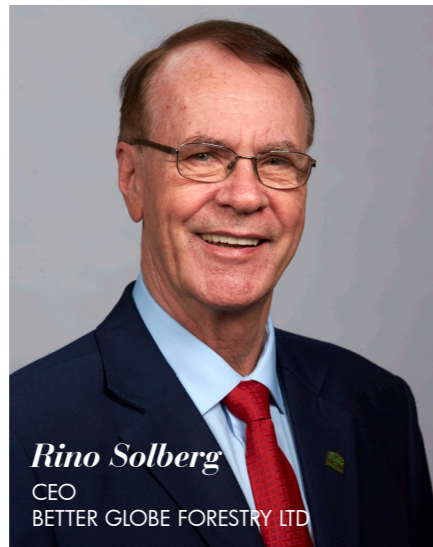
Our newest concept, Trees4Shopping, aims to change the way people do their shopping around the world and fight poverty and corruption in the process. This will be launched in late 2017.

**What advice do you have for other entrepreneurs who want to embrace a just cause?**

Firstly, it is vital to be passionate about the cause itself. Although everyone encounters challenges, having enthusiasm, determination and passion for your work will enable you to overcome these problems.

Secondly, if you are mainly motivated by money, you are not in the correct position to adopt a just cause and to make a legacy out of doing good deeds.

Your goal must be a lot greater than a personal achievement and it must also be sustainable.



*Rino Solberg*  
CEO  
BETTER GLOBE FORESTRY LTD



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