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Helping Hand: 'A different way to measure my success'

Monday, July 12, 2010

Thomas Raffa

Founder and president of Raffa P.C., a consulting, accounting and technology firm based in the District.

Charitable giving highlights: The company averages 53 hours a year of community service per employee, instituted a program that encourages employees to serve on the board of a nonprofit and gives away 10 percent of its gross revenues every year to charity.

Personal: Lives in Potomac with his wife. They have three children.

I spent the first nine years of my career doing Securities and Exchange Commission filings with one of the Big Four accounting firms. As I saw that I might be doing this for the rest of my life, I started to feel like there was a different way to measure my success. I wanted to be able to look at my work and say I was successful not because I made a lot of money but because I did something that helped someone else.

I left to start my practice in 1984. It only took a year to figure out that I wanted everything that we did to make some positive, systemic change in the community.

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sense for the corporate image or marketing-wise, then a lot of times I couldn't get through their board or stockholders.

So I spent a lot of time aligning companies with nonprofits in a way that makes business sense, too. For example, if a company needs staffing to clean buildings and Goodwill trains handicapped people to do cleaning services, we would try to link those two up in a way where long after I'm dead, that partnership still goes on.

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I believe one should give a piece of their time or dollars enough that it hurts. I have a balance in my life from doing that. If people could see the difference they make in giving \$10,000 to a small nonprofit, it's really powerful.

I remember there was an after-school program that had about 25 kids in it with a backlog of about 200 kids. The program had everything -- volunteers, facility and equipment. What it couldn't do was process the insurance forms quick enough to put the kids on the playground before the semester ended.

We funded a \$20,000 computer system that expedited this process. Sure enough, when I would drive home, I would see 200 kids playing in the after-school program. It was so little for so much.

-- Interview with Vanessa Mizell

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