

ALEC REED

Alec Reed CBE - Founder and Chairman of Reed Executive PLC

What are your motivations for getting involved in philanthropy and which causes do you feel most passionate about?

My personal philanthropy started early in life when as a young man I was involved in voluntary work. I very much believe that philanthropy is a life broadener and that it enriches life.

The initial motivation to set up the Reed Foundation was to benefit from the tax incentives. The Foundation later helped me to be more focussed about my giving.

I am passionate about three specific causes...

The first is working towards alleviating poverty in Africa, particularly Ethiopia. Through meeting extraordinary individuals and following a visit my wife and I made to Ethiopia, I was inspired to set up two charities – WomanKind (www.womankind.org.uk) and Ethiopaid (www.ethiopiaid.org.uk). I originally visited Ethiopia believing that the best thing I could contribute would be to provide training in business skills, but I realised that actually basics such as food, shelter and education needed addressing first.

Another passion of mine is the arts, as I believe strongly that this is the cutting edge of civilisation.

I am also greatly interested in wildlife. Man is consistently taking away from nature that needs safeguarding and replenishment.

How do you balance heart and mind in choosing charities to support?

I like to be proactive rather than reactive. I tend not respond well to being asked directly for funding and prefer instead to do my own research! I start with my head in choosing charities and then sometimes the heart follows.

How do you involve your children in philanthropy? How did you initiate conversation on this topic with them?

I have three children who are all Trustees of Reed Foundation.

My children became aware of charity quite early on, as both my wife and I have always been involved in charitable work. Family meal-time conversations would often be taken up discussing our experiences, so they were aware that some live a more difficult life.

I also have 11 grandchildren - two are about to take their first trip out to Ethiopia. I have even got the grandchildren involved! On their birthdays and other occasions, I will add a charity voucher to their gift. They research and choose the charities they wish to support. Nothing is more thrilling for them than receiving a letter of thanks from the charity!

How do you think that the current downturn will affect charitable giving?

I believe the current environment will affect charities, and therefore think that they will need to be very much more proactive now - rather than sitting back to see what might happen. They should take advantage of any matched funding provided by different donors. It is important that foundations and trusts maintain their spending and not hoard funds away.

I believe individuals will perhaps not be as generous. They will monitor their own incomes and potentially wait until there is an upturn.

In my view, there are going to be tough times ahead....

What do you find most rewarding about your involvement in philanthropy?

I don't give in order to get that 'feel good' factor or for accolades. I much prefer giving anonymously. I see it as just a matter of luck as to whether you are a giver or

receiver. I take a business-like approach to my philanthropy - if I am able, I help to solve that problem that gives me the greatest satisfaction.

As I mentioned earlier, philanthropy is 'life broadening' and that is what I enjoy most.

Is giving time as important as giving money? Why?

It is more important to give time to charities. Charities should make these opportunities better known - there are many people with skills who don't know where to start.

What advice would you give others looking to get involved in philanthropy?

I would suggest creating a Trust. It helps keep your spending separate from your giving!

Secondly, be proactive rather than reactive.

And finally, do use The Big Give (www.thebiggive.org.uk) to look for charities!