
Interview

Philanthropy, charity and CSR at Kimberly-Clark: An interview with Jenny Lewis and Alyson Gomez

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ABSTRACT Sue Mizera interviews Jenny Lewis, Vice President, Kimberly-Clark Charitable Foundation and Alyson Gomez, Manager, Global CSR Programs at Kimberly-Clark, concerning Kimberly-Clark partnership policies and practices, with emphasis on the Boys and Girls Clubs of America and Medshare International.

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Sue Mizera (SM): May we start with a little background about yourselves and your professional relationships to corporate partnerships?

Jenny Lewis (JL): I'm Jenny Lewis, Vice President of the Kimberly-Clark Foundation, the charitable arm of the Kimberly-Clark Corporation. My responsibility is to oversee the philanthropic strategy and community relations endeavors of Kimberly-Clark. We're based in Dallas, Texas and several of our national relationships are managed from here, but we also have community relations reaching further into our plants and mills in North America and global sites as well. I came to Kimberly-Clark three and a half years ago, and before that, I did corporate fundraising for a national non-profit. I've also worked for a large telecommunications company in sales, so I've had a mixed background in for-profit and non-profits, and this experience has given me a good perspective to come into this role.

Alyson Gomez (AG): I'm Alyson Gomez, I've been with Kimberly-Clark for two and a half years. My background is external PR. I've worked with a few agencies earlier in my career and when I first started at Kimberly-Clark, I worked with North American consumer brands to develop their external public relations. Almost a year ago, I came to work with Jenny in the Foundation, to work with our global brands to develop Corporate Social Responsibility programs. My responsibility is now developing global programs in conjunction with our brand teams and business units.

SM: So, in your roles now, you have to help Kimberly-Clark achieve corporate goals. What is Kimberly-Clark looking to achieve with and through its partnerships?

JL: The first and foremost thing we hope to achieve is impact. We put this first, we try to choose partners that we feel can

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achieve measurable results in addressing a real social issue. Over time, we want our partnerships to be sustainable and to create value for the community, for the partner, for those receiving the services. We want to make sure we're hitting all of those targets. We also look for partners to enable us to make our programs scalable. We start in one country and look to scale across to multiple countries. We want this to be sustainable, we want to continue for years and years to come; we want to build on successes and add value over time. We also want partnerships that are measurable. We look to establish partnerships where we can agree to clear metrics and what we are trying to achieve and hold ourselves accountable to this over time.

SM: Greater engagement of both partners can only generate greater impact. Can you speak a little to the kinds of impact you're having?

JL: We're increasingly changing the conversation. We've partnered with the Boys and Girls Clubs since the late 70's; today, we're changing that conversation and continuing to evolve the level of our partnership to be different. We've become much more specific about tailoring programs to fit a variety of needs, not only things specific to the needs of our non-profit partners, but also specific to Kimberly-Clark as a corporation. We evaluate what competencies we bring to the relationship (expertise, volunteers, services, etc) in order to help drive results and further engage in the effort to achieve impact.

SM: How do you set and measure success?

JL: We've always had report-out meetings with partners on an annual basis. What did we really do at the end of the year as a result of the partnership? Historically, we've moved things forward, we've offered more services or more elements in our programs, but that conversation has gotten much more specific and tailored. With the Boys and Girls Clubs, we want to hear

specifically: How many families walked through the door and participated in the program? What are specific examples of families who have achieved positive impact from a class or resources they received from the Club? Are there new ways that our employees can volunteer, engage and drive impact? In the home towns, have employees volunteered to teach career readiness or how to write a resumé? Have our finance people gone out to teach finance 101 or how to manage your income and your outgoing expenses? This is now much more of a collaborative partnership than before when it was just, let us hear what 'you' are doing.

AG: We've changed the way we talk to our own employees about impact, we do a better job than before. We're getting better about sharing success stories with employees, how many families are benefiting from our efforts and examples of our employees getting involved in programs we support. There has definitely been a shift over the years – away from reporting money donated to a deeper dive into the people impacted.

SM: What are you most proud of? Can you share some examples of impact or shifts?

JL: Absolutely. The Boys and Girls Clubs are a great example, one that's engrained in our heritage as a company, as we've been supporting them as a national organization since 1977. The long-term commitment of Kimberly-Clark is something I'm very proud of. We started with general support of their operations and their mission, but we have migrated that to be much more specific. Over the last 7 years, we've focused our support to be on strengthening families. The theory is, Boys and Girls Clubs provide after school programs for mostly disadvantaged kids. They provide positive role models and a safe environment; the kids learn character building skills, healthy habits, all that will make them successful students and ideally go on to graduate from high school and be contributing citizens to

their communities. What we've learned through our partnership: you can strengthen a child if you strengthen the family. This is a concept we took further as it is aligned with Kimberly-Clark and what we stand for as a company: serving families with essential products and essential resources.

We both recognized the need to expand our work to include Family PLUS, which stands for Parents, Leading, Uniting and Serving. The idea: young people have a better chance for success when concepts learned through the Clubs are practiced at home. We began in 2005 and we've had a significant impact since then: in 2005, of over 4000 clubs, 500 were conducting family strengthening activities. Last year, there were 1700 clubs offering Family PLUS, serving over 100,000 families. The program has definitely changed the way Boys and Girls Clubs provide assistance and how they work with their members. It has been a journey, for sure, but there is significant impact as families in need have opportunities for networks and assistance with finances and jobs. For example, if you don't have enough means to get through this month, they help you over the gap; if you're a family new to this country, they can provide help with English lessons or help with bank accounts and navigating taxes.

Clubs are looking for new ways to fill gaps at home to give a child a real chance at success. This is something the Boys and Girls Clubs have taken seriously and incorporated into their own 5-year strategic plan. They are changing how they approach their programming as a whole. Based on our idea in the partnership, and the proven results, the Boys and Girls Clubs have made this part of their national organization's strategic plan, and this is a big accomplishment.

SM: So through the partnership, Kimberly-Clark has advanced the goals and strategies of the partner organization itself. You've got to be proud of that. But isn't this completely consistent with Kimberly-Clark's

mission, to improve family's lives? Isn't this spot on to what you stand for as a company and what you contribute to your markets?

JL: It's all the things we look to achieve in a partnership. To be sustainable, measurable, impactful; to add value, engage employees and bring our core competencies as a company to its success.

SM: Besides Boys and Girls Clubs, is there another example of impact and success you'd like to share?

JL: Another example that I love to talk about is Medshare. It's a relatively new partnership for us, we've been involved since 2002. They have a fascinating concept at the base of what they do as a non-profit. The founders recognized that excess and surplus medical supplies are discarded and go to landfills across the US. The equipment is in working order, but may be considered slightly out of date for US hospitals. The founders of Medshare came up with the concept to warehouse and catalog all excess medical supplies and work with local hospitals to get the excess shipped to help healthcare facilities in developing countries. This meets a huge need because they just don't have the basics, like hospital beds, wheel chairs and even lights in operating rooms. I can say this as I've seen it in hospitals in Latin America. In fact, both Alyson and I have seen the impact. It's staggering, the things they don't have that we throw away here. So Medshare satisfies two needs: hospitals in the US can keep product out of landfills by recycling excesses while at the same time shipping lifesaving materials and much needed supplies to developing countries.

In the last 10 years, MedShare has shipped much needed supplies to 92 countries and recycled over US\$50 million worth of medical supplies, it's an amazing mission they're looking to fulfill. We saw this aligned with a lot of what we do, from the Kimberly-Clark perspective and from

our Health Care Business perspective. K-C business leaders saw this as a valuable partnership, one that is scalable, sustainable, with measurable impact and employee engagement. We have a senior leader who is a member of Medshare's Board and K-C volunteers monthly have given hundreds of hours getting supplies ready to be shipped.

From an impact point of view, this is one I'm definitely proud of. Just looking at a 1 year snapshot, in 2011, we were able to sponsor eight shipments primarily to Latin America, valued at just under \$2 million, and that in itself is incredible. When you look at return on investment, for every dollar we invest in MedShare, they deliver \$20 worth of supplies. They're incredibly efficient at what they do. Over time, we've sponsored 82 shipments and \$18.5 million of medical supplies, and our local facilities in country have also been able to build key social and economic relationships that are needed to further the level of local community impact.

SM: Can you speak a little bit about the people you work with in the organizations? Are they the same people year to year? How do the two partnerships, Medshare and Boys and Girls Clubs, work?

JL: They're different. Medshare is a grass-roots organization. The two gentlemen who started it saw the need. We started working with the organization from the very beginning. We were working with the founder until he retired last year. We've been side by side since they opened the doors to us as their first corporate partner. Even as it has grown, we've worked with the same people over the years. They're based in Atlanta, one of our home towns. I speak with them minimum quarterly. It's important to understand, what do they need, what are their challenges? If we want to do an offsite team building, we say, let's go to Medshare in Atlanta. Our people see their own products in there, they understand the

mission of Medshare, it reinforces why we partner with them.

As for the Boys and Girls Clubs – I speak with them a lot. They've had more turnover but you see this in a lot of non-profits. Our CEO sits on their Board of Governors and I support him in what he tries to accomplish from an advisory and fiduciary point of view. We help to fundraise for Boys and Girls Clubs, they have a large, annual dinner in Dallas, and Kimberly-Clark works side by side with them to assist in the fundraising efforts.

SM: It is clear what Kimberly-Clark provides in its partnerships and how you work. What does Kimberly-Clark want to get back from its partnerships? What about brand building or business building?

JL: This is a tough question. One of the things I learned when I worked for a non-profit was that corporate partners were often hesitant to tell us what they wanted from the partnership. They would say, 'You don't have to recognize us, just our logo on your website would be fine'. I really wanted them to let me help them talk about their contributions, but they were typically hesitant to do this. Kimberly-Clark is not much different. Historically, we haven't talked much about our philanthropic efforts. We were always active in our communities because it was the right thing to do, but we didn't feel the need to talk about it publicly. We are experiencing a shift in this behavior since our stakeholders are taking an increasing interest in our commitments to society. It is very important to us to be open, honest and authentic. When we talk to partners, we look for ways to build awareness for the cause we are supporting, what the social need is and what K-C can do to address it. If there's a way to tie this back to the mission of the company, what we want to accomplish, then it is a win-win. There are a variety of ways our partners offer to promote Kimberly-Clark: they cite our partnerships

on their websites, we collaborate on materials, but we're looking to other ways to get deeper engagement, e.g., product donations, K-C volunteerism. This is a measure of true success that gives us a solid basis to talk about how we are engaged as a company.

AG: When we have the opportunity from non-profits for our brands, our business units, our customers, our consumers to be woven into the process and the program, we can collectively have a greater impact on the issue. These are opportunities for Kimberly-Clark as a corporation, for our brands, our business units and even our consumers and customers.

JL: Our stakeholders are increasingly expecting this. For Kimberly-Clark key stakeholders, the issue of social responsibility wasn't a top issue 20 years ago, whereas today, it is of interest. Our stakeholders ask, 'What is their commitment to overall global sustainability, to social causes?' Prospective employees make decisions about where they want to work based upon a company's social and environmental commitments. If we want to stay competitive and recruit the top talent, we have to talk about what we do and be clear about it. This part of the landscape has definitely changed. Additionally, consumers increasingly want to support brands that are doing social and environmental good around the world and close to home.

SM: In your experience, what advice would you give to a new company entering into a partnership? What must they do to ensure success?

JL: Transparency is increasingly important. I want our core strategic partners to know what we are about as a corporation. Similarly, I want and need to understand their challenges. Don't sugar-coat things, tell me what's going on: What hurdles are you facing? How can we help? Just be honest. Those relationships take a while to build, but being open and honest with what's

going on is critical. We carry this to all of our relationships. We aspire to enter into real relationships: understanding our partner's business, how we can be involved and how we can cooperate together.

SM: Alternatively, what must a new company entering into a partnership avoid at all costs?

JL: Not thinking about their strategy first. It's important for companies to do their own internal analysis first. What is your giving strategy, your corporate mission, your social value add? What value and resources can you bring? By understanding this first, you are better equipped to navigate what cause you want to engage with and what impact you can have. This helps you to be better prepared to be held accountable for your part of the relationship and to in turn help to drive results in your program.

SM: Do you ever write a charter, spelling out roles, responsibilities?

JL: We have gotten better at that. We are working with our partners to jointly define what we want to accomplish over a 3-year period, aspirations, metrics, time-frames for checking in, success factors at the end of the year. We hold each other accountable for that. We measure this from a programmatic point of view as both need to bring deliverables to the table as promised.

SM: Evolution? What's your own next frontier?

JL: We can always be better, always aspire to do better things. We're in the midst of our full circle analysis of our philanthropy and social giving. We hope to evolve to get even better at what we do as we move to a much more cohesive, global approach. While we're pretty good in North America, we are looking at a deeper expansion into global markets. We're working on this now. We want to be focused on our social mission, but have something with global relevance.

We're also looking at bringing more people to the table. We're working with our global brand teams, business units, countries and regions to find out what's important to them, their communities, their consumers and their stakeholders. We are looking at how we can best bring our brands, our businesses, our consumers, our employees into the picture – all working towards the same goal. This is no small task, it will take time, but we've identified that's where we want to go, to weave it all together to get broader impact and engagement around the world.

SM: How does the Foundation currently interface with the partnership work of your individual brands?

AG: Individual brand teams all definitely have their own causes they've historically supported. For example, Depend has supported prostate cancer. Each brand's individual choice to support a cause that resonates with their consumer will not go away, but in future, we'll expand or shift in some instances to support both the K-C enterprise and brand. You can see why all of their efforts are very specific. This is a good thing. However, you can also see why/how weaving everything together is important so that we can align and deepen our impact in a particular social area. Water management is an example where we are weaving in global efforts for different brands, in different ways, in different countries. There will never be one solution to fit all brands. But we will work together for a more cohesive plan for all sustainability efforts.

SM: Are there any model partnerships you look to for inspiration?

JL: We do a lot of benchmarking. We have for the last several years. We look within our peer group and at gold standards outside it that embody what we aspire to be and do. Johnson & Johnson does a very nice job. They are very clear in what they do, very authentic with their stakeholders:

here's what we do, what we give, where, why. It's all very easy to understand and very relatable back to their business and values as a company. They provide financing and do pro bono work. They also bring a unique competence to nonprofits through medical consultancy and medical services. They do a nice job of bringing a clear set of competencies to the table.

Lenscrafters is another example, although completely outside of our category. They have a clear focus, no pun intended, and they execute it flawlessly. They're all about eye exams, getting to those in need with access to good eye health or glasses; they weave it into their retail stores, their mission as a company, they take doctors on the road to countries for exams, sponsor mission trips for employees to be involved. They tell their story so authentically, there's no doubt what Lenscrafters stands for.

We also tap into other partnerships to stay current. Committee Encouraging Corporate Philanthropy provides best practices about sustainability and social efforts around the world. Our CEO Tom Falk sits on the board, it's a forum that Fortune 1-2-300 companies look to for trends. The Center for Corporate Citizenship at Boston College helps us to ground what we do in academics and facts, to build better models and metrics platforms, to ensure we have a solid basis in what we do. We also partner with the US Chamber of Commerce and with the United Way Worldwide, with whom we do a lot of 'best practice' sharing. It's a continuing process of staying current.

AG: J&J is great. I like to pay attention to Coca-Cola and IBM, two companies that frequently do great things around the world and relate them back to core competencies and core businesses.

SM: Last, what do you personally gain from this?

JL: Being a part of a company's initiative to make social change is very rewarding. It is gratifying to see how engaged our people

are and the passion that they have around doing the right thing. Our CEO is willing to engage on many levels, including strategy development, fundraising, and board participation. We regularly tap into our senior leadership team to help us strategize, identify challenges and work through them. We are all working together to create the best social platform that we can. This makes me proud to work for Kimberly-Clark.

AG: I take such great pride in working with global brands like Huggies, Kleenex, Kotex. Every day I get inspired by the

innovation I see in the brand teams. We can also be innovative in our CSR programs and partnerships. This is very exciting professionally and personally. Perhaps it's a bit sappy, but on the one hand, largely what I do is marketing and PR, and I love it, but I'm not in the field, on the front lines, volunteering every day. At the same time, I get to go home and tell my family, I'm involved in helping make people's lives better. I make a difference in my professional life and I am proud.

SM: Thank you.