ENTREPRENEUR WITH ENVIRONMENTAL/HUMANITARIAN FOCUS

Mark Bent of SunNight Solar Company has developed a solar flashlight that lasts for seven hours. The battery can be recharged during the day and will last for at least 3 years. Bent is distributing his lights for free to poor villages in developing countries.

In the last year Bent has donated 10,500 flashlights in the Third world where most don’t have the luxury of electricity. Bent is able to donate his product through an altruistic sales pitch: for every Bogo (‘bogo’ stands for buy one, give one) flashlight that is purchased for a $25 price tag here in the U.S., Bent will ship another flashlight to the Third World and he also throws in $1 donation to an aid group. Corporate donors such as Exxon Mobil have helped his cause and bought his product in mass. To buy a bogo light go to http://www.bogolight.com/.

“I find it hard sometimes to explain the scope of the problems in these camps with no light....If you are an environmentalist you think in terms of discarded batteries, coal and wood burning and kerosene smoke; if you’re a feminist you think of it in terms of safety and security of women and preventing sexual abuse and violence; if you’re an educator you think about it in terms of helping children and adults study at night.”

In villages where the bogo lights have been distributed, villagers say their use ranges widely from night school to deterring criminal activity.

Mark Bent has an unusual career history to be an environmental entrepreneur; he is a former Marine and Navy pilot who spent most of his career overseas in the foreign service. He is also a Houston oilman! He started in the oil business in 2001 and has done much of his work overseas since. He has climbed the corporate ladder, but felt somewhat unsatiated with his success. He longed to contribute something more altruistic to the world. He started working on his product in 2005 and has worked with NASA, the Dept. of Energy and American universities to improve his solar flashlight. Bent now feels like he is more satisfied with the contributions he is making through SunNight.

Many professionals are feeling the need to contribute more than a profit. Some organizations are supportive to employees who volunteer their skills, expertise and time and have developed programs to provide employees with opportunities to volunteer or allow them sabbaticals to do so. The American Bar Association has been campaigning for U.S. lawyers to do pro bono work (40 hours a year) for quite some time now. Their efforts have been very successful. Other organizations have scheduled ‘community service’ work days, where employees go out and volunteer at various locations in their community in lieu of an 8 hour workday.

Businesses that support and initiate humanitarian efforts in their communities and beyond are on the rise and hopefully other entrepreneurs like Bent will lead the way to helping improve the quality of life for many less fortunate communities. (facts taken from article, Let There be Light for Others, J. Hamm; NYT blog, ‘My Global Career’)