

Helping Companies Give Back



Elizabeth A. Topazio

An Interview with Elizabeth A. Topazio,
Executive Vice President and Chief Legal Officer, Active Travel, Active International

EDITORS' NOTE In 1994, Liz Topazio joined Active's legal department, and in 2009, she was chosen to head up Active's travel department, as well as to serve as its Chief Legal Officer. Prior to joining Active, Topazio worked as an associate at Orloff, Lowenbach in New Jersey and Dechert LLP in Pennsylvania as a mergers and acquisitions, securities, and general corporate associate. She is a member of the New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania bars and graduated from Villanova University Law School in 1988 with a JD, cum laude, and Georgetown University, Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, in 1985 with a BSFS, magna cum laude. She is on the Advisory Board for Animal Alliance of New Jersey.

COMPANY BRIEF Active International (www.activeinternational.com) is recognized as the global leader in corporate trade, providing financial benefits to Fortune 500 companies in virtually every industry. Founded 28 years ago and based in Pearl River, New York, the company acquires underperforming assets – including surplus inventory, real estate, and capital equipment – at up to full wholesale value in exchange for cash and/or a trade credit, which is used to offset future operating expenses.

Corporate trade is usually associated with solving excess asset problems. How does it work for charitable donations?

It might be tough to see how corporate trade, travel, and charitable donations are connected, but Active International's strength is its unique ability to recover or create value through corporate trading. In this case, there was an opportunity to create a donations program using our clients' everyday budgeted group meetings and Active's existing travel investments and inventories in our portfolio of hotels and resorts.

We have a long history of supporting charities. In 1997, our CEO Alan Elkin and President Arthur Wagner created Active Cares as a way to

give back to the community. Today, Active Cares is involved with 600 nonprofits, most of them suggested to us by our employees and clients.

How does travel enter into the picture?

Over the years, Active Cares has donated many of our travel products to charitable organizations. Charities use our travel products to generate contributions through auctions and raffles. However, we became aware of the need to do something more based upon requests from our clients as well as the obvious contraction in donations from corporate America due to the economy. Our new Charitable Donations Program applies our flexible trading model in a unique way, taking our charitable efforts to a new level.

How does your Charitable Donations Program work?

The program is simple and transparent. When you use one of the participating hotels in our travel portfolio for your next business meeting, you will receive a charitable donation in the amount of up to 25 percent of your negotiated group room rate costs. A selection of the hotels and resorts in our travel portfolio can be viewed using our digital travel brochure at <http://travel.activeinternational.com/eportfolio>. Active Travel works with Active Cares and our clients to either make the donation directly to the charity on behalf of the client or to pay the money directly to our client so they may make and receive the benefits of the charitable contribution.

Would you describe the program's details?

It starts with selection of a hotel or resort from our Travel Portfolio. At the time of selection, we must clear our client with the hotel for the program. Only clients that constitute new business for the hotel are eligible for this program. Concurrently, upon selection and clearance, we provide the contribution amount. This is determined up front and is based on an agreed upon percentage of actual meeting costs. Our clients and their travel professionals (internal and external) maintain full control of their meeting, including all planning and negotiations directly with our participating hotels, rates, concessions, and other terms of the applicable hotel contract, as they normally would.

Upon completion of and payment for the meeting, Active Travel will issue a check in the amount of the pre-agreed upon charitable contribution. It's important to mention that our clients are under no obligation to book unless they are completely satisfied with the rate, concessions, venue, value, our service, and relevant terms of the hotel contract.

Are there any fees or commissions that a company should be aware of?

Active Travel charges no fees or commissions. Nothing is hidden and there is no obligation for any of our clients to book with one of our hotels unless they are absolutely satisfied with the rates, concessions, venue, etc.

We are able to provide the charitable donation without increasing rates or costs to our clients and without wringing discounts from the hotels as a result of our unique corporate trading model that enables us to generate derivative savings. We are committed to allocating a portion of these savings to fund our Charitable Donations Program. As a result, neither our clients nor our hotels are negatively impacted by our program.

What kind of services do you offer within Active Travel?

We offer our clients the ability to use our hotels and resorts for their meetings and group events, transient business travel, and incentive/promotional events. Active Travel has an extensive portfolio of hotels and resorts across the U.S. and internationally. We partner with a wide variety of hotels and resorts to help our clients offset costs associated with their budgeted corporate meetings and business travel expenses by using trade credits issued by Active to pay partially for an agreed upon portion of their travel needs. We also have a secure site available 24/7 for our clients to review our available hotels and resorts and make or request bookings.

Is Active Travel a travel agency?

No, we are a division of Active International. Our team is comprised of experienced travel professionals and corporate traders specializing in trading with hotels, brands, management companies, and hotel ownership groups. Our travel inventory is available only to our clients.

Do you replace or overlap with a company's travel department?

While we work closely with our client's travel department and professionals, we do not replace or duplicate any of their services. Essentially, we offer our Travel Portfolio to them and the opportunity to receive additional value or savings by working with us – it's all upside. They continue to fulfill their normal responsibilities and duties, including negotiating directly with the hotel and ensuring that they get the best rates, concessions, value, and venue for their meeting or event. ●