

A Platform for Giving

An Interview with **Melissa Lake**,
Executive Director, ONEHOPE Foundation and Co-Founder, Honeycomb

EDITORS' NOTE *Melissa Lake has held her current post since June 2012. Prior to this, she was an associate at Google Ventures in Mountain View, California. She is a board member for Dizzy Feet Foundation and Experience Camps, is a Social Innovation Fellow for StartingBloc; and is a Co-Founder of Roozt.com. She received her M.P.A. in Social Entrepreneurship from NYU Wagner Graduate School of Public Service and her B.A. from the University of Southern California.*



Melissa Lake

COMPANY BRIEF *ONEHOPE has quickly become one of the most recognizable cause brands due to the success of their cornerstone product, ONEHOPE Wine. Produced in collaboration with Rob Mondavi, Jr., the award-winning portfolio makes an impact with every bottle sold by donating half of the profits to partner causes. Today, ONEHOPE consists of the following products and experiences: ONEHOPE Wine (onehopevine.com), ONEHOPE Coffee, via-ONEHOPE (viaONEHOPE.com), ONEHOPE Foundation, and Honeycomb (honeycombimpact.com).*

Would you talk about the focus on giving back and how entrenched that is within the company culture?

This entire company was founded on the idea that giving back would be ingrained into every purchase that is made at ONEHOPE. Every decision that is made has an impact decision that is made alongside of it. For every new product we put out, we not only build in a donation amount and find a partner cause, but we quantify the impact that will be made through that donation.

Everything is strategic in terms of how we give. We always aim to make a donation that is going to make the largest impact based on how much we are able to give. We also thoroughly vet nonprofits prior to funding them to make sure they are as amazing and effective as we hope. This empowers our customers with the knowledge of what their purchase is going to do in terms of impact, and we can stand behind it.

How close is the coordination between the company and the foundation?

We are closely tied together. ONEHOPE Inc. is my parent company and the ONEHOPE Foundation is a separate 501(c)(3) from a legal standpoint, but I sit in the offices with ONEHOPE Wine's marketing

team. They're the biggest company I work with on a strategy to give back.

We see ONEHOPE Inc. as just a piece of the overall donations of impact that we will be able to make through Honeycomb in the future.

The goal is that ONEHOPE Foundation and Honeycomb become a platform for every business to give. Right now, ONEHOPE is the largest donor out of our partner companies and it's incredible to have such access to everyone there, where it can be a testing ground for new technologies and approaches

to giving that we develop. The goal is to execute flawlessly on the giving side of things and offer the service to thousands of other brands in the future.

How did Honeycomb come about and how does it work?

It's a platform for any business to be able to give back. We connect a business with an incredible nonprofit that we have thoroughly vetted and we put together the relationship so there is a quantifiable impact. We currently work with product and services companies where, for every product that is sold, a donation is made and we can quantify its impact.

The first thing I did when I came to ONEHOPE was to quantify the impact. The messaging used to be that "half of the profits were donated to charity" and now it's that "every bottle makes an impact" and includes an impact statement such as "Every case of pinot noir funds an animal adoption."

When that happened, we saw a large uptake in sales because people were rounding up. They wanted to fund a full unit of impact instead of only helping fund a portion of something. It was incredible how sales increased, which meant we could increase our donations.

Also, as a start-up, we have a lot of friends who are starting their own businesses. They reached out to us for advice because they wanted to do what we do in terms of giving but didn't know how, so we decided to make this into a scalable platform for any business. We charge a flat monthly fee so these services can be provided for them, and 100 percent of the donations received go back out to the partner nonprofits.

We wanted to make it easy for companies to give back so they didn't have an excuse to not do it.

We created Honeycomb as a true universal platform. Now someone can sign up with Honeycomb and pay through our website like any other SAAS platform. We are building technology

for social good and our first product is a widget that is embeddable into any e-commerce site. As people make a purchase, they see that an impact has been made in real time.

This allows us to work with brands that are already giving back in a great way and it immediately communicates the exact impact to the consumer.

Does this work across all companies regardless of size?

We work with a few Fortune 500 companies as well as start-ups. It comes down to finding the person in the organization who believes this is not only the right thing to do, but a good thing to do for the business. We like to have someone who believes in both sides of it. My goal is to increase every business's sales so I can increase their impact.

Do you see a way to track long-term impact with these efforts?

I do, although it's very difficult. At this point in time, we're only able to measure a small piece of the impact, such as meals served or trees planted – which is certainly better than not being able to track anything.

Down the line, we'd like to encourage all of our partner nonprofits to get better at measuring outcomes, such as how many people were moved out of hunger or how our air quality increased as a result of those activities. Those are the long-term outcomes we want to measure but it will take time.

How important has it been to make sure you're targeting to the right level to have that high impact?

Consumers don't have a huge attention span so taking three paragraphs to explain what our impact is won't be effective.

We aim for the simple message. That said, there is a lot of merit in having a robust program around giving back. Authenticity is also key. Consumers are smart – they can tell if something is not authentic.

There is a dance around trying to find the most elegant way to incorporate a cause. It needs to make sense to the consumer and be so simple and digestible that it's a no-brainer for someone buying the product to want to support that cause. They will choose to buy it over buying from another company that doesn't plant a tree, for instance.

Is it harder to get consumers to understand that the product is still of good quality?

It's incredibly important to have just as good a quality product as every other brand out there. The giving piece is what we call the tiebreaker. To create real brand loyalty, the product has to be good. ●