

KNOTS FOR CHANGE

Helping others is not usually a primary objective for a new business, but it was for this charitable entrepreneur

by Kevin McLean, Richmond Hill, Ont.

In the summer of 1991, I boarded a flight in Jamaica to visit family in the United States. Upon arrival, I soon realized that the world was faced with tremendous hurt and pain. Growing up in Jamaica, I was somehow sheltered from this fact of life.

By the time I migrated to the United States, in my opinion, things had just continued to decline. A sense of helplessness haunted me for the longest time. To combat that feeling, I did what I could to help others. Between school and working my evening jobs, I would volunteer at soup kitchens and animal shelters in my neighbourhood, and during the winters, I would take my snow shovel around the block and offer a hand to elderly people. This sense of obligation stuck with me throughout the years.

Now, more than 20 years later, I'm living in Toronto, but the overall situation in the world is just as disturbing to me

as it was during my days in the United States. Being older and a bit better established now, I have a few more resources to call upon, and I knew I needed to do something.

On a recent road trip with my family, I began expressing my concerns to my wife. She had heard my stories about helping others since we first met, and was always supportive. I asked out loud, "What can I create that will enable people to support a cause of their choice?" I wanted everyone to have a choice about whom they wished to support, feeling that it should be up to the person who is willing to help out to decide where his or her support should be directed. How could I help them achieve this? Looking down, I noticed my silicone bracelet. I thought "Bracelets!" but immediately wondered if the margins would be too low—we would have to sell thousands to be able to make a sizable donation to make a

difference. While I was talking out loud, my wife was taking notes, creating the business plan, as she later joked. We really needed something trendy: a bracelet that anyone could wear anywhere. A bracelet that had character. A bracelet that could readily identify the cause being supported by the person wearing it.

From this initial concept and subsequent research, we opted for stylish rope bracelets with anchor clasps, upon which a tag word was emblazoned. The anchors would represent the theme of "Anchoring People Who Care." The tag word on each bracelet would represent a specific cause, matched with a charity. We chose to name our business Knots for Change, in hopes of building relationships with charities worldwide.

The ensuing months had me hard at work sourcing materials and labour, and creating our online store, which was

designed to be a simple three-step interface: Choose a Cause, Choose an Anchor, Change the World.

Our mission is to donate 30 per cent of our sales directly to the charities matched to each cause. We offer our customers a wide

choice of unique, colourful bracelets made with the finest nylon and precisely moulded, lead-free zinc alloy for the anchor clasps, which are also available in a selection of colours. Once a customer chooses a bracelet on

our site, he or she is taken to a checkout screen to carry out the purchase. After each sale, our systems calculate 30 per cent of the purchase, tallying that information into our donations database, categorized by each cause.



Kevin, pictured at left sporting examples of his Knots for Change product lines, donates 30 per cent of every sale he makes to a worthy cause.

We launched our business September 10, 2015, and there was no turning back. The charities that Knots for Change supports are all Canadian registered and represent charities throughout Canada.

People often ask me, "What drives you to do all this? After all, you're not a famous person or a millionaire." My answer is that I am very passionate about helping others, and I believe strongly in peace,

human rights and animal welfare. I want to drive change! Something special happens to me when I lend a helping hand. From an early age, I've always wanted to make a difference; today, people all over the world are wearing our bracelets and helping us—and themselves—make a difference.

Creating Knots for Change has been an incredible journey and a life-changing experience for me, one that offers a measure of hope for a brighter future for all of us. ■

To learn more, check out www.knotsforchange.ca.