

GIVING BACK

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'Force multipliers for goodness'

Through 2 Guys Doing Good, Steven Foster and Rowan Pickering are bringing hands-on team giving to meetings and events.

By Blair Potter

GIVING BACK



While Steven G. Foster, CMP, has been an MPI member for more than three decades, he's having more fun than ever before thanks to a team-giving initiative he co-founded in 2020 with an industry colleague and friend that has really picked up steam since in-person meetings have surged post-pandemic.

2 Guys Doing Good was founded by Foster, managing partner of Foster+Fathom

in Dallas, and Rowan Pickering, president and CEO of The Event Team in Phoenix.

“We met after ‘stalking’ one another on social media,” Foster says. “Our companies had a similar mission and vision, and we also shared a common background as proud sons of veterans.”

Both companies also offered traditional team-building programs, but the two entrepreneurs agreed on one thing: Most teambuilding “sucks” because the activities are often poorly facilitated and structured to create winners and losers instead of building collaborative teams.

“Ropes, races and relays are good for networking, but offer no real opportunity to engage or connect participants to something greater, like doing something meaningful to help others,” Pickering says.

Foster and Pickering decided a great way to do good and give back in the communities where they live, work and meet was to formally align their companies, brands and missions. This also, Foster notes, helped to create more reach, depth and engagement. Three-and-a-half years in, 2 Guys Doing Good is aligned with almost 100 U.S. charitable organizations, serving a variety of causes.

“Our approach is simple: If your organization isn’t aligned with a charity partner, tell us the theme of your meeting or event—or what you’ve done in the past, what you liked and what you didn’t like—and we’ll customize a hands-on activation for you,” Foster says. “Rowan and I believe that if you’re taking the time to bring your people together to connect, learn and improve, it’s important to provide them the opportunity to join hands and work on a project that when completed will fundamentally change someone else’s life in an immensely powerful and positive way.”

While all 2 Guys Doing Good clients and employees can write checks, which is also important, that doesn’t create individual buy-in, Foster says.

“So when the real teamwork is done and the cause has been fully explained, we finish every event with what we call the ‘heart thing,’ a wow that underscores the impact everyone in the room has just made,” Pickering says. “It might be a recipient child or family thanking them in person or on video—or the CEO of the nonprofit organization explaining how their contribution of time, talent and

treasure is going to enhance its ongoing mission. It really is the most meaningful and fun thing I've done in my 32 years as an MPI member."

Their experience in the meeting industry and individual skillsets (Foster is a speaker and author; Pickering an emcee and event facilitator for concerts and automobile auctions) helps the 2 Guys Doing Good team know how to manage a group.

"We know when we walk in the room, there's the plan on paper (contract) and the plan that really happens," Foster says. "We're not going to get stressed about changes in the timeline or last-minute hiccups. We're there to help good people do great things, so we focus on being really good at the execution of the event, being flexible and making sure that the wow that we promised is the wow that we deliver."

Success stories: Las Vegas activations

The success stories are many, including two recent activations in Las Vegas. For the first event, the CEO wanted to do something to help those battling cancer.

"Rowan had a pre-existing relationship with a great local nonprofit in Phoenix called Amanda Hope Rainbow Angels," Foster says.

The nonprofit was founded by Lorraine Tallman in honor of her daughter, Amanda, who fought a courageous three-year battle with leukemia and nine-month battle with a brain tumor.

"Lorraine said Amanda hated having to take her shirt off for the chemo treatments and dreamed that one day she would design a fun clothing line for kids just like her that would provide comfort and dignity," Foster says.

When Amanda passed away in 2012, her mother created the foundation to provide a line of "Comfycozy's for Chemo," an adaptive apparel line that gives dignity and control back to patients undergoing chemotherapy and other treatments with a central line, providing them "a voice and a choice" in their treatment plans.

"Our first event in Las Vegas, Comfycozy Care Givers, gave almost 1,000 participants the opportunity to tie-dye patient and sibling shirts, design and

decorate patient backpacks with a variety of personal care items and create a tabletop display showcasing their efforts,” Foster says. “The attendees loved the event, and as we were sharing Amanda’s story, Lorraine was in the room visiting with everybody, and thanking them. That’s a powerful wow!”



Amanda Hope Rainbow Angels matches purchases of ComfyCozy’s, donating one for each one that is purchased for donation. So while 1,000 ComfyCozy’s were provided onsite at the Las Vegas activation, a total of 2,000 were donated to children fighting for life and dignity.

“That’s something you don’t normally experience in a typical team-building activity; it was fun, and it was creative,” Foster says. “It was amazing.”

The next Vegas activation: 2 Guys Doing Good was tasked with doing something to benefit individuals with autism. The idea: building a massive LEGO display benefiting the Las Vegas Autism Center.

“They use LEGOs in autism therapy because of the touch, the feel, the color, all of that,” Pickering says. “So we aligned ourselves with Master Builders (also called Brick Addicts), and they came to Vegas with us for a three-day activation on the expo floor.”

The LEGO project, Building a Community of Hope, was produced in partnership with a healthcare services and medical supplies company. 2 Guys Doing Good engaged attendees and exhibitors in assembling a 16-foot-long display of LEGO creations that included various buildings, vehicles, art projects and Minifigures, including the Las Vegas skyline and custom-built pharmacy models representing finalists for the conference's Pharmacy of the Year Awards.



“The client wanted to do something special for the award finalists, so our Brick Masters assembled the custom-designed sets onsite and we were able to surprise the three business owners with their own branded pharmacy replica to take home,” Foster says. “This was one of our most challenging activations. Watching it literally rise up from the expo floor as a collaborative project with our team and those in attendance was really fun. Some attendees brought their children to the event, so they were able to help us build as well, and they created some incredible freehand pieces. On the final day of the show, families from the Las Vegas Autism Center joined us onsite to see the donated items that would be presented to their organization, and also to help build set pieces.”

Helping and honoring those who served

Foster has been inspired by many people he’s encountered as a what he calls a “force multiplier for goodness,” many of whom have a military connection, such

as Cindy Dietz-Marsh, the mother of Danny Dietz, a Navy SEAL killed in 2005 as part of Operation Red Wings (featured in the movie “Lone Survivor”).

Dietz-Marsh’s biggest fear, expressed to Foster when he met her at an event, was that DJ (her nickname for Danny) would be forgotten.

“How do you respond to a Gold Star mom whose son gave his life for the country?” says Foster, who told Dietz-Marsh that he would honor Danny and the 18 special forces operators who were lost on that mission with a signature event that would ensure their names would always be remembered.

“We created Wheelchairs for Warriors, which allows participants to assemble specially designed titanium wheelchairs, powder-coated to any color scheme and customized by hand-stitching the name of a veteran recipient on the seat back of each chair,” Foster says. “We’ve presented chairs representing the six branches of the U.S. military and in honor of fallen heroes and Gold Star families to veteran recipients at Home of the Brave Living Centers, to soldiers at military hospitals recovering from physical wounds of war and to the Paralyzed Veterans of America.”

It’s important for a veteran transitioning from a hospital bed to one of these wheelchairs to understand that it’s not just another a wheelchair but rather a launching pad to the next stage of their life, Foster says.





"We've had so many veterans say, 'I didn't want to get in the hospital wheelchair,'" he says. "And this thing rolls in, and it's got their service branch or their name on the back of it."

Foster says he spent half his career sitting across from event planners and CEOs telling them why they should carve an hour-and-a-half out of their meeting to do good. But not anymore.

"One of the things the pandemic did really well is it reminded us of how blessed we are and how important connection is," he says. "And if you're taking the time to bring your people together, why wouldn't you give me 15 minutes, an hour, an hour-and-a-half to custom-curate something meaningful and that really builds connection within your organization? People want to put their hands on something. They want to feel connected, and they want to feel like the organizations they belong to actually do care."

Foster and Pickering have the best jobs in the world, Foster says, because they get to connect great people with great causes to make a real difference in the world through an industry they love.

"What's better than that?" he says. "We're bucket fillers and force multipliers for goodness."

