

RANA FLORIDA

The Creative Champion...

When I think of women who are smashing the glass ceiling, Rana Florida is top of mind. As CEO of the Creative Class Group, Rana is one half of the visionary global advisory firm that has transformed how we define and encourage prosperous and healthy cities and communities. Her articles on business and leadership have been featured in The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal. As a media personality, she's interviewed President Bill Clinton and First Lady Michelle Obama. She uses this considerable clout as capital for her many philanthropic endeavors and causes, including the Design Exchange (Canada's only museum dedicated to design heritage), G.E.M (Girls E-Mentorship), and the St. Mike's Hospital Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. On top of all this, she's a mom of two infant girls. It's only fitting then, that she talks to us about the importance of making time for "giving back" in today's time starved world...

Philanthropy is really woven into every aspect of my life, and always has been. Growing up in Michigan, my aunts and uncles were always doing humanitarian and philanthropic work, so I got excited about "giving back" at a very young age. I volunteered as a "candy striper" in my teens, and later I joined the Founders Junior Council at the Detroit Institute of the Arts (DIA). We organized a hugely successful fashion themed benefit every year called "Fash Bash." Now, with my husband (Richard Florida) and our company Creative Class Group, our work examines ways in which communities and cities can be healthier and happier... Naturally, philanthropy is an essential part of that.

Giving back, in whatever way we can, whenever we can, is really a core tenet at the heart of Creative Class, and (because Richard and I are life partners as well) our household. I couldn't even quantify how much time we spend every week on philanthropic work, because we have incorporated it into our lives and our work so completely. I mention that because I think the "time factor" is a barrier for many people who are contemplating getting involved and giving back in some way. I talk about it in my book *Upgrade*: Everyone is so time-starved these days, I call it "time famine." We're all trying to buy back time in our everyday lives using apps like Uber Eats or services like Grocery Gateway... So the very idea of spending time on philanthropy is just too overwhelming. Like, "How could I possibly make time for fundraising when I'm already struggling to get everything done in a day??"

If you were to really examine your activities closely for a couple of days though, you would probably find a lot of your time is spent on "filler." These are things that don't have any value that just take up our time. If we could cut out some of that "filler," we can reclaim these huge portions of time, and potentially put some of it to use doing charitable work. And the thing is, "giving back" shouldn't be an afterthought. It's an important component of a healthy and happy lifestyle. It really does add a "feel good" value to your life that nothing else can give you.

People think philanthropy requires a full time commitment, or that they have to be rich to make a contribution, which is not true.

Spend a couple of days a month volunteering somewhere, or foster a cat or dog, or introduce your network of friends to a cause by throwing a party for them... There are so many ways you can give back that don't require all of your time or a bottomless chequing account. You can offer your expertise to an organization, or help elevate a brand or cause through your social media or marketing platforms - those things count too.

With Creative Class, we give back in all those ways I describe. We donate our expertise, we give speeches and make personal appearances to help increase visibility for certain causes... Any initiatives that encourage the growth of healthy cities and vibrant communities, that is what we are passionate about and what we commit to. I (like many) have a soft spot for children, so I tend to connect with organizations that help advance kids, especially young girls. I'm currently on the advisory board of GEM (Girls E-Mentorship), which is an organization that offers mentorship programs to high school girls facing socio economic barriers. Being a female business leader myself, GEM and its mission really spoke to me. There are so many roadblocks preventing young women from getting those MBA's, getting those executive leadership positions and running corporations... I want to see that change. Instead of creating another barrier like, "Go make an appointment with a career counsellor," which can be quite stressful for someone who feels ostracized in any way, GEM is removing these obstacles and making it easy for girls to reach out through email, text and social. At the click of a button, they can get advice or feedback from really established women that they wouldn't ordinarily have had access to. I love that GEM is using the technology we have now to make things more accessible to these girls, it's such an innovative way to engage young people at such a critical time in their lives.

That is really something we champion at Creative Class: using creativity and innovation to lift one another up and give each other a chance to succeed. It doesn't take much on an individual level - but it does take commitment. If you commit to something (anything!) you are passionate about though, making the time for it actually becomes easy. //



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