

How one woman shattered my cynical view of charitable giving

In early 2018 I was Lime's first hire in Europe, promoting kick scooters at the iconic Galerie Lafayette, there I met the discreetly charismatic Myriam Vander Elst. A word led to another, here we were sharing our perspectives on philanthropy.

Temps de lecture : minute

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Coming from a challenging background, I was acutely aware of the millions in donations some NGOs received on TV during X-mas eve shows making donors feel better about themselves, while my friends and I struggled to secure even basic support in our poor neighbor. Frightening gap. Did donors even know some beneficiaries weren't seeing much of that money, if not at all? Some seemed to have a warm sunny Christmas holiday while our reality remained: freezing.

Changing my views wasn't an easy feat. Yet, over the years, while my career evolved to exited founder (IPO Nasdaq), now GP at Don't Quit Ventures, Vander Elst's compelling narrative at Epic Foundation addressed my deepest skepticism about NGO efficiency. I realized the younger versions of myself could finally receive the help they needed, rather than seeing resources unwisely spent in god knows what associated costs NGOs run by.

Learning about Epic's rigorous vetting process resonated with me. It mirrored the questions I ask before I back a company: "How are funds used? What is the market share? Are there audits? What measurable KPIs and OKRs are in place?" This alignment with my investor mindset transformed my perspective on philanthropy. Shit was finally real, our

donations can have a lasting impact, turning some Christmas eves warmer.

All of which had me wondering: Who is Myriam Vander Elst, Chief Engagement Officer at Epic Foundation rewriting the text book of philanthropy?

Myriam Vander Elst: A visionary bridge between finance and philanthropy

In the often-rigid world of finance and philanthropy, Vander Elst stands out as a purposeful reminder on how one's luck calls for a greater purpose to help others. Her journey from a successful family business to becoming the Chief Engagement Officer at Epic Foundation is a testament to her remarkable ability to navigate complex social landscapes and create meaningful change.

A quest for purpose

Born into a family with a thriving business legacy spanning six generations, Myriam found herself at a crossroads after the sale of her family enterprise. Rather than resting on her laurels, she embarked on an odyssey to find a cause that aligned with her values. This quest for purpose showcases Myriam's innate drive to make a difference, a quality that would later define her career path, leading disappointed founders like me, to trust philanthropy, one more time.

The pivotal encounter

In 2015, she met with Alexandre Mars, the founder and CEO of Epic Foundation, this encounter proved to be a turning point in Myriam's life. Mars's vision of "making giving the norm" resonated deeply with her, and

she was drawn to the foundation's principles of honesty, impact, and effectiveness. This serendipitous encounter not only gave Myriam the purpose she sought but also set her on a path to becoming a formidable force in the world of philanthropy, leading the foundation from scratch to the light house it has become today.

Bridging worlds

Over the years Myriam has masterfully positioned herself as a connector between the often-disparate worlds of finance and philanthropy. Her unique background in business, combined with her passion for social impact, allows her to speak the language of both sectors fluently. This rare ability has made her instrumental in uniting founders, Venture Capitalist and individuals with resources and power who are willing to share with those less fortunate. This approach to philanthropy is refreshingly pragmatic and free from conventional constraints. She challenges the notion that wealth should be a source of shame in the old continent, instead advocating for the responsible use of financial power. Her perspective that "it's not about being ashamed of wealth - it's what you do with it that counts" encapsulates her philosophy of purposeful giving.

A force for change

The higher you get into any pyramid, the more you bump into men's domination. Myriam's stubborn belief in her mission transcends gender led stereotypes. As she puts it, "This is our century," referring to the vital role women play in reinventing capitalism and driving social change where so many men have failed during so many years. Talk about two hits with one stone, here you go.

Looking ahead

As I reflect on Myriam Vander Elst's journey, I'm filled with optimism for the future of philanthropy. I see a visionary who has successfully married the worlds of finance and philanthropy, creating a legacy that extends far beyond monetary value. Her work continues to shape the landscape of giving, inspiring a new generation of philanthropists to use their resources for the greater good.

As I conclude this article, I'm left with a sense of excitement about the future of strategic philanthropy and the positive impact it can have on our world. I've finally found a tool to empower my youngest self, that's the best Christmas gift I could ever wish for.

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