What Bob, George and Our Moms Taught Us About Giving

By Mike Musallel
Chairman, Chief Executive
Edwards Lifesciences Corp.

By Shelley Hoss
President, Orange County Community Foundation

Editor’s Note: Irvine-based Edwards Lifesciences Corp. became an independent publicly traded company in 2000 after a spin off from Baxter International Inc. Today, Edwards, best known for its artificial heart valves, is Orange County’s most valuable public company at about $5 billion in market cap, and among its largest manufacturing employers, with over 4,000 local jobs.

Mike Musallel, who's been its only chairman and chief executive, was ranked 15th by Harvard Business Review’s list of the best-performing global CEOs.

Mike’s motivation to create meaning in his work extends beyond transforming Edwards into a leader in patient-focused innovations. It's a guiding principle in his personal philanthropy. Mike recently gave the keynote speech at the Orange County Community Foundation’s annual meeting on why he and his wife, Linda, make significant investments in philanthropy.

Shelley Hoss, who has been president of the Newport Beach-based foundation since 2000, was one of the five honorees at the Business Journal’s 24th Annual Women of the Year awards in May. Shelley interviewed Mike about his insights and wrote this article for the Business Journal.

What influenced your passion for giving?

I was inspired to give back from an early age by my family. My older brother, George, was diagnosed with Down Syndrome as a young child—a challenge my parents responded to in an incredible fashion.

My mom dedicated her life to helping George succeed. She taught him reading and arithmetic and how to handle money. She even organized the other mothers in the area to form an association for children with special needs.

Together, they found a place where the kids could go that was eventually transformed into a home where they could live and work in the community.

From my mother’s example and her tireless work on behalf of George and others like him, I learned the importance of compassion and helping others.

And because of my brother’s huge heart and the love he brought our family, I have been inspired to focus my philanthropy on supporting individuals with special needs.

When I met Linda, we discovered we had the remarkably similar and incredible life experience of growing up with a sibling with Down Syndrome—in Linda’s case, her brother, Bob.

Both of our mothers truly dedicated their lives to giving their sons and others like them better lives, and both had incredible success in doing so. We found that this common link shaped us and our thinking.

How has your approach to personal philanthropy influenced philanthropy at Edwards?

Linda and I were both passionate about giving back, but we weren’t sure where to start, so we turned to the Community Foundation.

Because we were both deeply devoted to our brothers with Down Syndrome, this allowed us to think more rigorously and strategically about our passion. We understood that we couldn’t accomplish everything, but in the areas we devoted ourselves to, we could really make a difference. With trusted guidance, we’ve supported physicians who specialize in treating adults with the genetic disorder, and also pursued our passion for education and health through a number of focused projects.

In my professional life at Edwards, a defining element of our culture is a commitment to charitable giving and participation in philanthropic causes. We employ highly focused strategies, partner with the right organizations, and live out our purpose-driven mission across all of our work.

What are the keys to creating philanthropic impact?

Partner with other like-minded individuals and learn from the experts. When it comes to philanthropy, we’re on a learning journey. We’ve seen firsthand just how much more you can accomplish by working together rather than going at it alone.

My wife and I, for instance, have been passionately involved with the Glenwood Housing Foundation, an independent living facility in Laguna Beach serving special-needs adults, thanks to excellent guidance and a community of supporters. Linda has a special passion for Glenwood and dedicates considerable energy to helping them achieve their goal. Through our work, we’ve had the chance to meet charitable individuals who were ahead of us on the journey, who we could learn from and team up with.

How do you encourage others to give back?

People need to find meaning in their work, because that meaning inspires the best results. Similarly, impactful philanthropy starts with finding your passion—identifying the causes that matter most to you and the change you want to see.

Linda’s and my giving journey began with our love for our brothers and a passion for helping others like them live healthy and happy lives. We then found expert guidance and a community of collaborators to further our impact and make it strategic and sustainable.

Stories like Mike and Linda’s demonstrate that real change occurs with the issues we care most about when you start with passion, think creatively, and collaborate strategically.