



SPREADING THE SPIRIT

Suzanne Ackerman-Berman, responsible for Pick n Pay's (PnP) transformation programme and the PnP Foundation, says the growth of entrepreneurship is the only answer to economic freedom

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Almost two decades ago, the Pick n Pay (PnP) group gave its founder Raymond Ackerman and his wife Wendy a legacy gift that their daughter, Suzanne Ackerman-Berman, says celebrates her parents' enduring actions to fight for the consumer. It also recognised and honoured the risks her father took when he employed people of colour long before it became a state imperative.

'The gift was R30 million, held in trust by the creation of the [PnP Foundation](#), and presented on the day we celebrated PnP's 30th anniversary,' she says. 'A more meaningful gift you cannot find because in true Ackerman and PnP style the foundation exists for the greater good of humanity and has become entrenched in the company and with its stakeholders.'

So, like most good CSI efforts, philanthropy starts at home with a focus on job creation, skills development and the mobilisation of entrepreneurs. These have in one form or another always been the at the core of the group, says Ackerman-Berman. Similarly, a customer-centric focus has been applied across the brand because, in the words of the founder Raymond, his legacy is 'the customer is always right'.

'This combination has resulted in PnP being a company with a soul,' she says. 'We believe that without one, a business has no reason to exist.'

Ackerman-Berman says the PnP Foundation is not about charitable handouts – it exists to make an impact, be that job creation, the transformation of land into a viable resource, or a project that can evolve into an income-generating entity where people can use skills, or even acquire those, to generate their own income.

It is an impact that is difficult to measure but, Ackerman-Berman confirms there are obvious

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results to be found in the number of jobs, businesses and land that become sustainable. The basic rule is to only go where there is a need, and then allowing the effort to run on its own after two to three years. It is a formula that has generated strong interest by the Industrial Development Corporation and the Department of Trade and Industry, along with other corporates, that wish to partner with the PnP Foundation.

'We believe that the growth of entrepreneurship is the only answer to economic freedom and those companies that concur are keen to investigate creative ways with the PnP Foundation to bring more people into the formal economy,' she says. She believes that PnP and other successful SA firms have a social, ethical and moral obligation to reach

out and provide opportunities to those who were discriminated against.

Who better to understand this concept than the Ackerman family whose forebears, as Jewish immigrants from Russia, experienced discrimination. It is such a deeply entrenched awareness in the family that to ignore it would be hypocritical, she says. In the same context, as fourth generation retailers, she says her father embraces the concept of consumer sovereignty, quoting him as saying: 'In listening to the needs of the customer, you have to have your ear so close to the ground that you can hear the grasshoppers jumping.'

Since inception the PnP Foundation has created more than 2 500 sustainable jobs. Its mentorship programme is currently assisting 82 small firms, with mentors sourced from PnP's own employees and consultant base, be those tax or legal experts or other role players. 'In fact, we have hundreds of people from whom we can draw knowledge and guidance.' This formula – Doing Good is Good Business – will also be applied outside SA during the group's expansion into Africa. Its most recent – and 59th – store is located in Zimbabwe.

It is often said that corporate philanthropic efforts involve the 'heart, the head and the guts'. Ackerman-Berman says one can't exist without the other. 'Heart involvement means consciously making a difference. Keeping your head means you understand where skills are most needed, and can analyse the risks. Guts, because those that are prepared to take risks and follow their instincts are people who have real passion and dedication.'

'Everything is about transformation and it is the only way we can address the inequalities of the past and improve society. It is an imperative in the way we do business,' she says.

'Following the path my father blazed, PnP continues to fight for the customer and consumer rights, while simultaneously looking to make a sustainable and improved impact on humanity.' ■