

Thinking Outside the Box

An Interview with Lisa C. Paulsen,
President and Chief Executive Officer, Entertainment Industry Foundation

EDITORS' NOTE Lisa Paulsen was named to The NonProfit Times' Power & Influence Top 50 in 2009, 2010, and 2011. Some of the key accomplishments in her current role include streamlining the Entertainment Industry Foundation's (EIF) grant-making process to help fast-track scientific breakthroughs such as Herceptin®, which successfully treats one in four cases of the most aggressive form of breast cancer. Most recently, Paulsen and the EIF team co-founded Stand Up To Cancer (SU2C)



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with other leaders from the entertainment community to accelerate research to get new therapies to patients quickly in order to save lives. She has also spearheaded the launch of several other national initiatives, each of which raises awareness and funds for important causes such as improving public health, most notably through cancer and smoking cessation programs; as well as arts and education; and the environment. As CEO, she also helps high-profile celebrities shape their philanthropy.

ORGANIZATION BRIEF Using the assets of the entertainment industry – talent, production expertise, marketing outreach, programming – combined with the knowledge and expertise of a diverse and respected team of specialists, powerful thought leaders, and policy-makers, the Entertainment Industry Foundation (www.eifoundation.org) helps raise awareness and funds to address critical issues locally, nationally and, in some arenas, globally. It was established in 1942 by Samuel Goldwyn, Humphrey Bogart, Joan Crawford, and other Hollywood legends. Today, EIF builds sophisticated and effective media campaigns; funds education and support programs; and advises on issues relevant to nonprofits and philanthropy. Under Paulsen's leadership, EIF's annual charitable budget has grown from \$1.8 million to more than \$160 million. To date, more than \$180 million has been pledged to Stand Up To Cancer for cancer research.

What role was EIF created to fill and how has the organization evolved?

In the beginning, we were governed by the movie studios, but today, they have been joined by the major television networks and all the agencies, unions, and guilds. It's a collective philanthropy and we are privileged to use the industry's incredible voice to drive positive change on key issues.

Each year, we fund nearly 200 charitable programs nationally – and soon globally – that deal with health, education, poverty, and volunteerism. Our largest campaigns are in the health arena, specifically cancer research.

How do you determine if a potential collaborator is the right fit?

We look for outstanding leadership. Before investing in a nonprofit, we evaluate how it will best serve communities and if it has the capacity to build. In terms of a prospective supporter, we ensure that we share the same charitable

objectives before engaging a celebrity ambassador in a co-branded cause-related marketing campaign or highlighting a company's philanthropy in one of our televised fundraisers.

What results have you been able to measure from your efforts?

We built a colon cancer initiative with Katie Couric after her husband died from the disease when she was still the *TODAY* show co-anchor. Katie knew she could use the platform of speaking to millions of Americans every day to stress the importance of screening and that particular initiative helped bring colon cancer “out of the closet”. The University of Michigan did a study three years after the campaign's 2000 launch and documented a 20 percent increase in colonoscopies, dubbing it the “Couric Effect”.

Katie and I were having dinner with Jeff Zucker, the former head of NBC, and we talked about bringing the networks together to produce our first Stand Up To Cancer “roadblock” televised fundraising special. We went to top cancer researchers throughout the country and asked, if we could generate significant revenue for research, how should it be invested?

All these major investigators said they would fund “translational” research – done by teams of scientists at different institutions – to get new therapies to patients quickly.

The Nobel Laureate who oversees the research recently said that Stand Up To Cancer is the best dollar spent on cancer research in the country. We're able to leverage engagement of the media in a very significant way, involve some of the biggest stars in the world, and secure substantial revenue from corporate donors, philanthropists and, most importantly, from the American public. Our efforts are working; the entertainment community is facilitating important change.

Where does the innovation for the organization come from?

We represent a creative and provocative industry – its members are interesting thinkers and doers, and move quickly. With the luxury of having senior executives from every studio, network, and agency on our board, we can think outside the box when we put an initiative together. We are storytellers – we align entertainment community leaders with the issues they care about most and they communicate in a way that resonates with the public, motivating people to do something.

Over the past few years, we've aggregated the industry's resources for major undertakings and we've had good success – we're having a clear, demonstrable impact.

Are you able to work with celebrities on their own initiatives?

Because we're a service-based organization created and owned by the motion picture and television industry, our role is to leverage the philanthropic platforms of everyone in our industry.

We recently launched The American Comedy Fund with Comedy Central, which is designed to support comedians while they're struggling financially. Many of the major comedians who have come up through the stand-up world are involved because comedians are a tight-knit group; even those who achieve great success remain glued to the friends with whom they started out.

Are you ever surprised at how quickly this industry is able to mobilize?

Right after the earthquake in Haiti, I got a call from Matt Damon's agent who asked what EIF was doing. George Clooney and MTV had mobilized immediately – the MTV CEO called to tell us they were doing a telethon. Our support for this was 24-hours-a-day every day for two weeks and the stories told through that show clearly conveyed a tremendous need.

The public responded, donating \$66 million to support organizations that were quickly doing great work on the ground in Haiti, both with immediate disaster relief and long-term rebuilding.

Do you ever look back in appreciation of how much you've achieved?

It's heart-warming when we receive notes from people saying we saved or changed their lives. Scientists tell us that SU2C's new model for funding research is fundamentally changing the way science gets done, greatly benefiting patients.

But honestly, we don't spend a lot of time “looking back” – we're always thinking about the future, and the problems and challenges the entertainment community's unique role can help address. ●