

## Our World, Our Family

An Interview with Luella Chavez D'Angelo, President, Western Union Foundation

**EDITORS' NOTE** In December 2000, Luella Chavez D'Angelo was hired to serve as the Inaugural Director of the First Data Western Union Foundation. Before joining the Foundation, D'Angelo was the Director of Marketing for the Denver Museum of Nature and Science. Previously, she was the Director of Marketing for the New Mexico Museum of Natural History & Science. Prior to this, she was Vice President of Institutional Development for the University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center. D'Angelo holds a bachelor's degree in Marketing Management and a master's in Business Administration, with an emphasis on Finance, from the University of New Mexico.



Luella Chavez D'Angelo

**ORGANIZATION BRIEF** The Western Union Foundation (<http://foundation.westernunion.com>) supports initiatives to empower individuals, families, and communities through access to better education and economic opportunity via Western Union's Our World, Our Family® signature giving program. The program is a five-year, \$50-million commitment reflecting the efforts made by Western Union employees, agents, and partners around the world. Since its inception, the Western Union Foundation has awarded almost \$55 million in grants and disaster relief to over 1,870 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in 100 countries.

### How critical is corporate responsibility and community engagement to the culture of Western Union, and how do you drive that through the organization?

It is a core value at Western Union. Every day, we help the world's migrant population send money to their loved ones in countries they had to leave for reasons like economic instability or extreme poverty. We see the mobile workforce taking, in some cases, 20 to 30 percent of their hard-earned salary and sending that money back home to take care of their families.

When we decided to embark on a new corporate citizenship platform, we decided, most importantly, what we should not stand for, because we don't have endless resources. We needed to focus where we could have the biggest impact. We stopped grant-making for about a year, and conducted market research, and got a lot of advice on where we could make the

biggest difference. What we learned was that the world's mobile workforce needed access to better jobs, and that they get access to better jobs when they have access to better education.

So we built this program, *Our World, Our Family*, around giving migrants better access to education and the tools needed to launch successful businesses, so the entire family unit can increase their economic standing.

### Was it critical to maintain a close alignment between the giving and the business strategy of Western Union, and to be successful, should there be coordination between those areas?

Yes. Initially, there were some leaders within who thought that alignment would look too self-serving. But we unveiled the program in September of 2007, because we believed it was the right program. We're now seeing a lot more social entrepreneurs coming out of college, so it's almost a requirement for the best of corporations to have this embedded into your strategy. This platform is helping us recruit in a way we never have before.

The other thing we've seen is an increase in the number of donors to the Western Union Foundation, and the amount of volunteer activities that either individuals are initiating on their own or as a group, because now they have somewhere to hang their hat. We've seen an increase of more than 30 percent of our workforce wanting to engage in volunteer activities where they can spend a day or a week to contribute to *Our World, Our Family*. We also just closed our workplace giving campaign in December at 47 percent employee participation.

We have more than 50,000 agent businesses around the globe that operate 410,000 agent locations. The agents are not employees of Western Union – they're independent contractors. We've seen the same thing happen with them. Now they can contribute to their communities through the Western Union Foundation where they get a 1:1 match, and they're doing it in alignment to help these migrant populations get access to better jobs, to create small businesses, and to help their families on both the send and receive side.

In addition, we're a grassroots ethnic marketing company, so we have these locations all over the globe in some of the most rural towns in the world. Where we market is on local streets. In 2009, we've seen the marketing dollars start to become integrated with *Our World, Our Family*,

so we're getting leverage and alignment where our dollars are going further and we're having a much bigger impact, not only on the communities we want to serve but on the recognition and public relations side as well.

### On the business side, you have metrics in place to evaluate results. Is it challenging to implement those metrics on the giving side, and how critical is that?

We have an internal *Our World, Our Family* score card, where we track everything, from how much employees are volunteering to how important staying at Western Union has to do with what we stand for, in terms of our philanthropic platform. We've been humbled by this program getting such great recognition not only by the Committee Encouraging Corporate Philanthropy but the Stevie Awards, the U.S. Chamber's Business Civic Leadership Center, and the Martin Luther King, Jr. Business Social Responsibility Awards.

Other metrics are more challenging. One serious intention we had in building this program was to be somewhat of a voice for the world's migrant population, because there was so much controversy, particularly in the United States, about who a migrant was, what a migrant did, and whether or not a migrant should be in our country. We mounted a speaker's bureau so our key leaders could speak at as many places as possible, to explain why migrants migrate in the first place and what they're trying to do for their families back home. We don't just think about this remittance business as transactional; we think about this remittance business as profound acts of love, because that's what they truly are.

### How critical was the commitment from the CEO and leadership to making sure that the long-term vision could be carried out?

I was able to do this because our CEO, Christina Gold, had a long-term commitment and vision. Building a program like this not only takes staff resources; it takes financial resources, and time. So without the CEO's commitment, it would be difficult to keep the funding, the momentum, and the programs going.

### How challenging is it to find a work/life balance in this role, and can you ever get away from the job?

Our business is tied to human life and human behavior. The main reason why people move in the first place is to make sure that some human aspect is taken care of in their home country. So it's tough, but when we see the impact, it's worth it. ●