

The Joy of Giving

An Interview with Rob Hale, Co-Founder and President, Granite Telecommunications

EDITORS' NOTE In addition to leading the tremendous growth and development of the business and team at Granite, Rob Hale and his family are perhaps best known for their charitable and philanthropic work. Hale was awarded the Boston Red Sox Jimmy Fund Award in 2014 for his long-time commitment to the lifesaving mission of the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute and the Jimmy Fund. In 2017, Hale and his wife, Karen, were honored by the Breast Cancer Research



Rob Hale

Foundation with the Inaugural Carolyn Lynch Humanitarian Award. In 2018, the pair were honored by Brigham and Women's Hospital with the Heritage Key Award. Additionally, Partners Healthcare saluted the Hale's with the Jack Connors Philanthropic Leadership Award. For 2019, The Chronicle of Philanthropy listed the Hale's as one of the top 15 most generous philanthropists in America. Granite was also recognized in 2019 as the Most Charitable Company in Massachusetts. Hale has held or holds leadership roles at Boston Children's Hospital, The Massachusetts Soldier's Legacy Fund, The Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, Deerfield Academy, his alma mater Connecticut College, and the Brigham & Women's Hospital. Hale and the entire family of teammates at Granite host an annual Saving by Shaving event to benefit the Boston Children's Hospital. Hale is also an owner and Director of the 17-time World Champion Boston Celtics of the National Basketball Association and the owner of the Boston Cannons of Major League Lacrosse.

COMPANY BRIEF Granite Telecommunications (granitenet.com) is a leading communications services provider for businesses with multiple locations. Granite provides one-stop solutions for voice, data, Internet, wireless, video and secure network options throughout the United States and Canada. Granite understands that no two businesses are run the same way, and creates a flexible communications solution tailored to each customer's needs today and in the future. Granite's scalability allows its clients' businesses to grow with imminent demand.

What was your vision for creating Granite Telecommunications and what have been the keys to Granite's industry leadership?

When we started in 2002, the idea of consolidation of multiple locations across the country did not exist, and it was our customers, specifically Walmart and Walgreens, that mapped out this opportunity for us. They told us that this aggregation would be useful to them, and this became the bedrock for who we are today. I did believe that we would be an industry leader because I knew that we would work harder than everybody else, but I cannot say that I foresaw the amount of success that we have achieved. It is

beyond what I could have expected.

Is it challenging to maintain the Granite culture as the company has grown in size and scale?

It is vital to maintain the culture, and it is hard. Twenty-two years ago, there were seven of us, and ten years ago there were 700 of us, and approximately 600 of those people worked in the same building. Today, just at our headquarters in Quincy, Massachusetts, we have three buildings, and we have 14 other big offices and 22 other smaller offices across

the country. It is much harder to replicate the culture and family feel because you can't touch and feel each other. I visit all of our branches every quarter, which takes a lot of time and work, but it is critical to be with our people and to build relationships. We have company calls every Monday with the entire company. In order to drive the growth that we aspire to, we need to continue to expand into different locations and facilities, but at the same time we need to prioritize the culture which is the foundation for who we are as a company.

What do you tell young people about the type of career the industry offers, and do you feel the business is well-understood?

I do not think our business is well-understood by those entering the workforce. Many accomplished young people see financial reward in private equity, banking, technology, which I do not hold against them. However, I think there are a number of ways to achieve this goal, and in many ways as opposed to being one of many bright, talented people going into the same arena, which is going to be a very competitive arena, why not think about different arenas where you can stand out. Our industry



Rob Hale speaking at the Quincy College Commencement in 2021



Rob Hale at a leadership event at Ron Burton Training Village

can appear pretty stodgy, but for Granite, when you peel back the onion and see what is inside, it is clear that it has unique successes because of our innovation. The notion of consolidating a nation's worth of services, as I mentioned before at the suggestion of our customers, was created by Granite.

We have just released a new product that is a wireless backup device which is patented and has never existed before. We are at the forefront of innovation, and when you are fleet of foot and flexible and nimble, you can separate yourself from your competitors. We do things differently which is part of our DNA.

Where did your interest and passion for philanthropy develop?

I was raised in a family where taking care of the community was part of our culture. I think this focus blossomed as I became a businessperson and became more involved in the community, and as we started to have moderate successes. I think as you achieve success, any leader if they are being honest with themselves will realize that those successes are a byproduct of a great team and a great community. As I began to have even more success, I realized that my success was firmly a byproduct of a great community, and if we had these successes, we should share them with our community. This has become part of who we are as a company, as well as who my wife and I and our kids are as a family, and it is truly joyous to be able to do philanthropic work.

How do you decide where to focus your philanthropic efforts?

My wife, Karen, and I have organizations that we support that are important to us as a family, but all of that philanthropy is a byproduct of Granite's successes. The fact is that I am part of Granite, and Granite is part of me. There are choices that we make as a family for who

we support, and there is another facet which I am honored to be part of which is supporting causes that our Granite teammates are interested in supporting. While my family philanthropy and Granite's philanthropy are independent, they are in many ways intertwined.

A key aspect when we evaluate an opportunity to support an organization is who the leader of that organization is and how that leader is driving the mission of the organization. We look to build relationships with the leadership of the organizations we support, because it is not just about giving money, it is also about giving your time, ideas, and expertise to support the mission.

A great deal of attention is given to the large gifts you have made, but you are also committed to making smaller gifts to organizations where it can really make a difference which was seen with your commitment to gift \$1 million a week to small nonprofits for 52 weeks straight. Will you discuss this effort?

A few years back, Karen and I tried to give one large gift usually of \$50 million to an organization each year which we did for 3-4 years, and this was to Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, Brigham and Women's Hospital, Boston Children's Hospital, and my alma mater, Connecticut College. These are all institutions that we wanted to help, and I am honored to be able to help them. The health institutions we support are world-leading institutions in Boston that are impacting the world, so in many ways these are three gifts at once. You help the Boston community; you help with world community because those researchers are inventing medicines that will affect everyone around the globe; and you help the Boston business community because what Boston is best at is medicine and education, so if we can foster that and stimulate growth, it is good for the entire region. I love to support these types of institutions.

We decided a few years ago that there are some great organizations that we became aware of in our travels that we were not helping because we were doing these large gifts. You and I have known each other a long time, and you know that I am a goal-oriented person, and Karen and I decided to make it a mission to gift \$1 million a week to these types of organizations for 52 weeks straight. This would allow us to impact 52 organizations. I found that helping a small organization with a brilliant leader and a great vision that did not know if they would have funding to continue in a few months was unbelievably rewarding. We not only wanted to help them create an endowment, but we also wanted to provide our knowledge and expertise to help them put a structure in place for the long term. When you see the work these organizations do on a daily basis and know that you were able to help them become permanent, it is as compelling, and even more compelling, than the big gifts.

What led to your decision to donate \$1,000 to each of the University of Massachusetts Boston graduating class of 2023 by presenting each graduate two envelopes, both containing \$500, with the idea that they could keep one and give the other to a charity of their choice?

Karen and I have come to realize that giving a gift brings more joy than receiving a gift, but you can't know this until you are able to experience it. University of Massachusetts Boston, which is six miles up the street from our office, is an urban school with approximately 73 percent minority students, and roughly 69 percent first generation college students. There are many kids in that school who are working their tails off, and I admire them. The reality is that they probably do not have a lot of excess resources, so they may never have had a chance to give a financial gift. I hope that by creating that opportunity, and giving them a chance to experience that joy, will make this a part of their lives going forward. I received hundreds of letters from these graduates telling me how they planned to donate their money which was a very special feeling.

Are metrics important to measure the impact of your philanthropic work?

In business, you can measure most things pretty closely. In the philanthropic world, it can be much harder to measure. Are you helping 11 kids, 1,100 kids, or one kid – and if it is one kid, are you really, really helping that kid. We are focused on making sure the organization is a 501(c)(3), has a great leader, has a great mission, and is an organization where we can build a relationship and facilitate their ability to compound their mission. If we believe in them and what they are trying to do, then we want them to spend their time and energy on fulfilling their mission rather than having to report back to us.

Do you take moments to reflect on what Granite has achieved and the lives that you have been able to impact through your philanthropic work, or are you always looking at what is next?

To be honest, there is not much reflection – there is still so much more to do. ●