



MBA's Without Borders donate skills to end poverty cycle

updated 5:45 a.m. EDT, Mon June 15, 2009

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- MBA's Without Borders matches MBAs with businesses in developing nations
- "Business might be the one way to alleviate poverty," says founder Tal Dehtiar
- Jon Ven Johnson works in Laos, helping disadvantaged youths build a career
- He says he wanted to use his business skills to help people who really need it

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By Mark Tutton
For CNN

TEXT SIZE

LONDON, England (CNN) -- Jon Ven Johnson is a Texan working in Laos, where he helps disadvantaged young people build a career. But Ven Johnson isn't an aid worker. He's an MBA with a background in management consultancy and what he's offering isn't charity -- it's years of business experience.



Jon Ven Johnson (second from left) with the DDD finance team in Laos.

Ven Johnson, 41, is working as a consultant for Digital Divide Data (DDD), a non-profit company that trains disadvantaged youths in Cambodia and Laos and gives them jobs carrying out IT services for international clients.

He found the position through MBA's Without Borders (MWB), a Canadian not-for-profit organization that matches MBAs from around the world with small businesses and not-for-profits in developing countries.

The idea is that MBAs can help small businesses and not-for-profits by providing the know-how and experience needed to help them grow.

MWB was founded in 2004 by Tal Dehtiar and Michael Brown, themselves MBAs. Dehtiar had previously worked on community projects in Belize,

Costa Rica and Chile and wanted to create a way for business professionals to use their skills to have a positive impact in the developing world.

"MBAs have been trained in how to build a business and create sustainability," Dehtiar told CNN. "They have these amazing skills that are not always utilized, or showcased, for the good."

"I really believe that business might be the one way we can alleviate poverty. I don't believe the answer is handouts, but in developing and supporting businesses that can grow and hire 100 or 500 people. Think about all the families they affect."

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If a small business or non-profit decides it could benefit from the services of an MBA they can approach MWB with their requirements. If the project is deemed suitable, the position is posted on MWB's web site and MBAs can apply for it, just like a regular job.

But an MBA doesn't come for free. MWB pays the MBA's air fare, health insurance, vaccines, and a monthly stipend of \$500 to \$1,000. In keeping with its business ethos, MWB expects the employer to pay at least part of the costs, with the remainder funded by donations through

foundations, corporations, MBA programs and individual donations.

It was through MWB's web site that Ven Johnson found his position as Finance Capacity Builder with DDD. By training young people who grew up as orphans, or come from impoverished villages and providing them with well-paid IT jobs DDD gives them with a way out of the poverty trap.

Do you think MBAs can help fight poverty? Sound Off below.

DDD has grown from an informal organization with 50 staff to employing 500 people in three countries. Ven Johnson began working as a consultant for the company in March and his role is to assist in its transition to a global organization.

"I bring the knowledge of how a business should run according to Western standards -- specifically, how finance departments are structured, the typical financial reports that should be produced each month and what measurements they should be watching to help them gauge their success," he told CNN.

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