

The story of Willem Horstmann



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"Impressive in many ways, heart warming, and above all a truly inspiring experience." What can you say in the little time before the elevator reaches the top floor? These were just a few catchwords I scribbled down when we had to write an 'elevator pitch' as our last assignment in the Better Future leadership program. They wanted us to be prepared.

And prepared I was. "How was your trip to the Gambia?" Not yet fully adjusted to business as usual I gave them my elevator pitch. Some people wanted me to elaborate, some preferred the shorter version. Within a week after my return home I got completely absorbed by work. To all queries about the program, I answered with any suitable version of my elevator pitch: for the short story press 1 –for elaboration press 2. I sounded like an answering machine, where did the inspiration go? I reckon this happens to most of us upon return. Just like we all found out that real inspiration never leaves your mind. What really struck me in the program soon came back to me.

We visited a local NGO that had been in a total deadlock for two years. Its board was unfit for duty and the organization was near a breakdown. The simple fact that we offered to help was the impulse they needed to get their act together. Our efforts and enthusiasm encouraged the members of the board to rethink the situation. Beforehand, no-one had thought a breakthrough ever to be possible in this case. Well, three months later a new board was installed and the organization is making unbelievable progress. What inspired me was that merely giving what was in, could already make a big difference. Having recovered the feeling of inspiration, I wanted to focus my energy in the right direction. I started to involve other AEGON staff members in a program for good causes. I am convinced that besides the tangible impact it makes on our social environment, there will also be a great number of positive spin-offs for the company.

The support of AEGON employees for a corporate social responsibility program is overwhelming. As a matter of fact, many employees were already involved in community service on their own initiative. A logical next step was to gather a team of enthusiastic and charismatic people who could lead the way to a companywide CSR program.

As AEGON already sponsors athletes, cancer research, and foundations like Right-to-Play, we want to see if we can orchestrate our involvement better to increase the benefit for civil society. Another focal point of the CSR program is the concept of micro-pensions, whereby it correlates with one of our core competences. A third theme is an idea called "University of Life", which enables retired people to deploy their skills and years of experience to the advancement of society. We know that many people would like to do so after retirement. Moreover, the University of Life could also be a rewarding add-on to our pension product.

Most ideas are still at the drawing table and there is lots of work to be done. Together with Better Future we are gaining momentum. As for myself, I do too: for inspiration press 3.

"By merely giving what was in me, I made a big difference."



"CSR correlates with our core competences by way of micro-pensions."