

BLOG

Breaking Barriers Through Conservation, Philanthropy and a 24-Hour Race

By John Mina, CEO

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In business, and in life, we should constantly seek growth, and it does not come easily or comfortably. To experience the most growth, achieve necessary change, and advance, we need to push ourselves outside our comfort zones. We need to challenge the “normal” way of doing things in search of improvements that benefit all. We need to break barriers.

I have been committed to driving transformational change in all aspects of my personal and professional life for a long time. As a business leader, I believe we have a broader responsibility to support important causes and champion philanthropic organizations that are dedicated to making a difference. Together, we can break down barriers and fight for our future.



Paving the Way, Making a Difference

This past weekend, on April 23, I set out to push myself further than I ever have before in support of one of my favorite causes by participating in the [Shenandoah Epic](#). For almost 24-hours straight, I hiked, biked and paddled my way through some of the most rugged terrain on the East Coast.

The race broke down my personal barriers, tested my navigation skills and challenged me physically and mentally. The challenge of completing the race itself motivated me, and when the obstacles seemed impossible to overcome, I remembered the true reason I was there - to raise awareness and support for [Conservation Nation](#), an organization working to address one of the most urgent issues of our time: conserving our planet and finding sustainable solutions.

Now that I'm on the other side of the race, I'm thinking more about its potential influence on the broader business community. My hope is that my efforts will encourage other business leaders to find meaningful ways to support the causes that *they're* passionate about. I don't expect all CEOs to sign up for 24-hour races. I do believe we have a responsibility to integrate philanthropy and sustainability into our respective leadership philosophies and corporate policies.

Businesses and their leaders can leverage their position to make a powerful impact. We should not hesitate to make our care for others known. Philanthropy can even lead to enhanced revenue and

retention. Employees and customers are increasingly investing in companies that incorporate charitable giving in their mission.

Conservation Nation, Removing Barriers to Save Our Planet

Conservation is by far the cause I am most passionate about. When I discovered [Conservation Nation](#) (formerly Friends of the National Zoo), I was immediately energized by their mission “to accelerate conservation progress by fueling a self-sustaining movement that brings a more representative and inclusive community of conservationists to the fight, today and in the future”.

Conservation Nation breaks down access barriers for underrepresented groups, opening the field of wildlife conservation to a broader population. We need every voice heard if we are going to save wildlife and their habitats. Conservation Nation brings those voices, and their innovative solutions, to the fight. I am proud to serve on the organization’s Board of Directors and am committed to supporting them however I can. In 2018, I climbed Mount Kilimanjaro to raise awareness and funding for conservation projects, and I was happy to support the organization again through the Shenandoah Epic.

Embracing Impactful Change in the Workplace

In addition to challenging our personal limits and advocating for important causes, business leaders must look within their own companies to identify opportunities for impactful change. It’s easy to accept the way things have always been done, but traditional practices are often not in alignment with our modern workplace, and overlook opportunities to improve and further perpetuate the business for our associates, clients, and investors.

At Risk Strategies, we’re working to break down barriers and challenge norms through the following initiatives:

- *[Diversity and Inclusion Program](#)*: As an organization, we are committed to diversity and inclusion (D&I) and have set an example in our industry by creating a culture that celebrates and supports all backgrounds. We have a D&I Council and D&I initiatives that mentor and uplift members of our diverse workforce.
- *[Ways of Working Program](#)*: When the pandemic forced our employee base to work from home, Risk Strategies led the insurance industry in embracing permanent remote work. As restrictions were lifted, we gave our employees a choice. They could continue working from home, or they could return to the office if they preferred. As CEO, it was important to me that I listened to my employees and transformed perceptions of the way work “had to” take place. The results have been fantastic. The initiative boosted employee morale and productivity and enabled us to attract top talent nationwide. We are quickly becoming a destination workplace.

Lead With Your Conscience

I encourage all leaders to identify ways to radically improve their business, push themselves outside of their comfort zones, and get involved in world-changing initiatives. The most effective modern corporate leaders have a conscience. It is crucial that we show our employees, and the world, how much we care.

I hope all who are reading this are inspired to break down the barriers holding them back from growth. Together, we can make the kind of meaningful changes that can make a difference for our planet.

To read a recap of my race, [click here](#).

To see photos from my Shenandoah Epic adventure, visit Risk Strategies on [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#).

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