



PHOTO: PHIL CARLSON

Peter Yankala owns Phillips Men's Wear.

The Shirt Off His Rack

PETER YANKALA LOOKS BACK AT HIS TRANSFORMATION FROM MEN'S CLOTHIER TO LOCAL PHILANTHROPIST.

For the past 45 years, Peter Yankala has helped thousands of men dress for life through his downtown Barrington business, Phillips Men's Wear. Now with family clients who often span three generations, Yankala has built his business to serve both clients and the community at large. Not a day goes by that Yankala isn't on social media sharing fun photos detailing his passionate support for nonprofits that have a footprint in Barrington along with his patrons and friends who pitch in. We asked him for the backstory on his nonstop community engagement.

I BOUGHT PHILLIPS, IN 1974. The store was already established and had an impressive customer base. I worked in tandem with Leo Phillips, the founder, for the first few days. The first sale I made was significant and I had a pleasant interaction with the client. Leo filled me in on the client I had just worked with, mentioning both his

professional accomplishments and philanthropic endeavors. Only 23 at the time, I'm pretty sure it was the first time I heard the word philanthropic. I remember thinking someday, after all of life's upcoming responsibilities were funded, I too wanted to be a philanthropist. I mean who wouldn't?

Over the decades, there was comfortable



Peter Yankala frequently raises funds for the fight against ALS.

success—kids, vacation cottage, a reasonable lifestyle. It included some monetary donations, but nothing that would come close to qualifying me as a philanthropist. Besides, there were so many things I thought I wanted to give to, that everything I could bundle would matter little.

One day, while serving as a volunteer at Illinois Children's Hospital School, I met someone who engaged me in a conversation about my business, its location, and the community's per capita net worth. My shallow reply was, "I think there are as many foundations as there are families in my customer lists." Unwilling to accept a cliché answer, he wanted to know what I was doing to help? It was then I realized, not much.

"Many people have this feeling that they are not giving unless they are sacrificing," he continued, which is like the old idea that unless medicine tastes bad, it can't be good. "The most important giving is often simply sharing something of which we have in plentiful supply."

Within the next year a friend became the honorary chair of American Cancer Society. Though she humbly credited her family foundation, it was evident she was a tireless activist who gave so much more in network than net worth. She was a motivational speaker and a connector of resource and need. Though her financial contributions



Peter Yankala interviews long-distance open water swimmer Doug McConnel of Barrington about his effort to raise awareness and funds for ALS research.

were significant, there was much more involved in her philanthropic accomplishments. The words of my hospital conversation came back to me.


A VALUABLE NETWORK

I finally realized that the concept of donation was much broader than financial. I recognized there was a different kind of contribution I could make. I'd spent over 40 years building thousands of customer relationships at Phillips. Without realizing it, I'd created a network of people with whom I could start conversations on behalf of nonprofit causes. I discovered that many of our clients were involved in worthy philanthropic activities in our community. Slowly and carefully, I began to cross-market with them.

Initially, our involvement was good old store counter collection boxes. But as we experienced our clients' interest and generosity, we began to build a social media platform. Our media pages now have a reach of over 75,000 followers. Though our content focuses on business, style, and lifestyle, we've learned that causes, events, and community involvement generate much more engagement.

TRUTH IN GIVING

The truth is, you don't have to donate money or give property to practice philanthropy. When we give of our time or our expertise, we are philanthropists. When we refuse to give up on our values, our family, our friends, our neighbors, our communities, our world, we are philanthropists. Even bestowing our attention on another person can make a difference.

If we are breathing, we have something to give. And regardless of what we give, giving it with good heart will feel good. 

Peter Yankala has been Barrington's men's clothier since 1974. His business is also a local go-to place for community members who want to follow his lead in support of many charities.

A resident of Chicago where he is a volunteer and architectural docent, Yankala also shares his love of photography online at www.whylilkechicago.com. Phillips Men's Wear is located at 123 Station Street in downtown Barrington. Reach by phone at 847-381-1282.



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