

Investment Banking Gurus Join For-Purpose

Posted: Wednesday, October 7, 2015 - 11:11

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After working on opposing teams in the corporate world, some of Australia's biggest names in investment banking have joined forces to raise money for an international charity.

[Adara Partners](#) is the latest Adara Group venture, established by Suncorp director Audette Exel.

The 10-member, high-profile advisory panel, which includes David Gonski and UBS Group CEO Matthew Ground, will donate their fee to projects that help women and children in Uganda and Nepal.

"It's a significant new expansion of our existing corporate advisory business. We think this is the world-first attempt to bring the concept of using the mastery and skills of the investment banking for-purpose and directly harnessing the power of investment bankers to generate revenue for people in real need," Exel said.

"The Adara Panel follows the model of the Australian Takeovers Panel, which is a very well accepted and well-loved part of the Australian mergers and acquisitions world.

"The panel consists of 10 founding panel members, who are really some of the most famous and well-respected people in the Australian corporate advice sector, including real luminaries."

The Adara Panel also includes Greenhill Australia co-Founder Peter Hunt, Diccon Loxton from Allens, AMP Director Catherine Brenner, ANZ Director Ilana Atlas, Steven Skala from Deutsche Bank, Guy Fowler and Peter Mason from UBS, and Dr Nora Scheinkestel from Macquarie Atlas Roads.

The panel members have agreed, working in pairs, to run at least one corporate advisory mandate per year for Adara's existing corporate finance business.

"It allows our business to have a much deeper bench of really senior people to do deals, and to do many more deals, and all the funds that are generated go directly to people in extreme poverty through Adara Development, our NGO," Exel said.

"Adara partners is a construct for really brilliant, really senior investment bankers to offer their skills, their wise-counsel, their senior advice to corporate Australia and the big Australian families, knowing that all the fees they generate will go to people in poverty."

Exel said one of the highlights in establishing the project was providing high-level competitors with the chance to work together.

“This is a very collaborative cross-competitive boundaries venture. One of the wonderful moments for me when we launched was watching them lean across the table and shake hands with each other and one of the things they were all saying is, I’m really looking forward to working with you,” she said.

“I think that shows the spirit that underpins everything we’re trying to achieve. At Adara our tagline is ‘bridging worlds’, we believe that to really change the world we have to bridge divide, and that’s yet another example of that.

“We’re laying down competitive pressures and getting amazing people to work together for good and they’re very excited about it.”

Exel said she had been developing the concept for a number of years, inspired by her own experience of achieving social outcomes through the finance world.

“We’ve got 17 and a half years of working in the intersection between investment banking markets and the Not for Profit sector, having built a business entirely for-purpose so long ago,” she said.

“I’ve been lucky enough as somebody who has banking, legal, business skills to be able to use my skills for-purpose for nearly two decades, and so I’ve been thinking for a long time how it’s enhanced my life beyond measure.

“I’ve been thinking a lot in the last few years of how I can bring the amazing opportunity I’ve had to a wider group.

“The model it fits my dream which is to get to 20 years and be able to say we’ve got a 20 year track record sustainable funding stream really having showcased the way you can use investment banking skills directly for-purpose.”

But Exel said the timing of the project also fills a market gap for the “unparalleled” combination of high-level, independent service from traditionally competing advisors.

“In corporate Australia there’s risen a real interest and need for wise-counsel and very senior people to advise on deals,” she said.

“There’s a market opportunity I think for the chance to have two of the most senior people in Australia advising on a transaction without any financial interest or other corporate interest at all; totally independent advice around complex transactions.”

Exel said Adara Partners is bigger than Adara itself and she hopes the model can start a new funding movement.

“There’s something much bigger here, there’s a whole new model and construct where investment bankers can use their skills for good and I think the time is really right for it,” she said.

“If we can make it work here in Australia we can show the whole world how to do it, and what a great contribution that would be if we could say to the investment banking community, look we’ve nailed this in Australia, corporate Australia loves it, the investment banking community in Australia loves it, millions of dollars have been generated for people

in need. We will show the rest of the world how it was done and help others to do the same thing.

“For me that will be a great point to get to and a really great contribution to the debate around how you bring business skills and Not for Profit skills together.”

Although they are high-profile bankers, Exel said, when assembling the panel, the 10 members jumped at the chance to use their skills to benefit the charity.

“They immediately embraced the concept that we could create a structure where they could use their skills directly to benefit vulnerable people, they loved that idea,” she said.

“And they’re certainly not people who need to go out and find another corporate finance deal, they’re really at the top of their game, it was the purpose piece and the model piece that they loved.”

The challenge in establishing Adara Partners was navigating legislative barriers, but Exel said both corporations and government bodies assisted the project.

“We had fantastic support from Minter Ellison who did all the pro bono legal work and it was quite complex work legally, they also got the concept and saw that it could be game changing,” she said.

“And we also had huge support from ASIC [Australian Securities and Investment Commission], our regulator. They really worked hard to make sure we would be properly regulated as a corporate finance advisor but at the same time they gave us relief from various provisions of the corporations act to allow the panel to function.

“The highest levels of the regulator, the top levels of investment bankers and the highest accounting and legal firm, Deloitte also have been on board, have stepped forward to help me and to bring this to life for Adara.

“All of us see this as a big step in the business community, we’re not just generating huge amounts of support on a regular basis for people in poverty, we’re modelling something that’s much bigger than we are and so the leverage on that is fantastic.”

The next step for Adara Partners is to engage corporate Australia. The panel will work with Australian corporates and families in the area of independent advice, mergers and acquisitions, corporate strategy and mediation services.

They already have their first client but Exel said they are seeking more to hire Adara Partners as their corporate advisors.

“The next piece for us, is to make sure that we have a good deal flow. We see ourselves very much as a compliment to the existing investment banking community, not a competitor,” she said.

“The next six to 12 months will be a lot of work to make sure we’ve got good deal flow, to make sure the model is working well and then we’ve really got something we can share with others.”