



Wendy Steele with Impact 100 Jersey Coast Advisory

THE WENDY STEELE STORY

Never in her wildest dreams did Wendy H. Steele imagine that Impact 100, the women's giving circle she created in Ohio back in 2001, would expand into a movement that's given away tens of millions of dollars to non-profits worldwide.

“I truly felt I was building Impact for Cincinnati -- what I was creating was solely for that community and those women,” she said recently.

A surprise boost came when “People” magazine interviewed her for an article on giving back to one’s community. Once the feature hit the stands in January, 2003, her old AOL account and her land line, “blew up” with calls from all over the country. People were eager to know if she would be willing to license her idea. Instead, she gave it away.

“I created Impact to empower women to see themselves as philanthropists and part of the solution to significantly fund the non-profits,” Steele explained. “I shared it freely.”

If you attended our Annual Meeting in November, you will recall that Steele delivered a spirited address in which she praised Impact 100 Jersey Coast and encouraged us to keep forging ahead.

Earlier that day, Steele sat down and talked about her life, the Impact movement and why it has gotten traction, beginning with these impressive statistics:

Since its inception in 2001, Impact 100s globally have given \$55 million to non-profits (as of late 2017). Meanwhile, in 2018 alone Impact 100s gave an estimated \$11 million to non-profits. Not bad for an idea



Wendy Steele with Nancy Phalanukorn, Family Resource Associates

conceived fewer than two decades ago, when Steele was vacationing in Upper Michigan with her three young children.

Her goal back then was to create a viable way to link the professional women in her community to the non-profits. With a background in private banking and trust, Steele knew not only the power of finance, but how challenging it can be for a busy woman to actually give back. Hence the Impact model, in which women can become as involved as much or as little as they wish.

Steele estimates that 50 percent of the women who join Impact have never written a check of more than \$1,000 to a charity. The other half are “seasoned philanthropists”. “When these women sit down together on a Focus Area Committee, the seasoned philanthropist is likely familiar with the non-profits, whereas the “newly minted” philanthropist may have used a non-profit service herself, or knows someone who has”. As Steele framed it, the latter has her “feet on the street.”

“When you bring them together to discuss the non-profits, you end up with a better outcome.” However,

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regardless of which category a woman fits in, “everyone has the same voice and the same vote.”

A “semi-empty nester” Steele lives in the Clearwater Florida area, close to her aging in-laws as well as the Tampa Airport. The business she founded and runs, “Generosity Matters”, provides consulting services for corporate and private clients as well as non-profits.

She is member of three Impact 100 groups -- Cincinnati, Travers City, Michigan, and Pensacola, FLA, and jokes that in spirit, she’s a member of “all of them!”

And that number, 52, is rapidly multiplying. In fact, Steele said there are more communities interested in starting an Impact 100 than there are Impact groups!

“It’s the snowball effect. The more Impacts there are, the more people learn about them and say, ‘I want one!’ They’ve always grown by word of mouth”, she said.

Another reason for a spike in interest may be the times in which we live, or as she puts it, “Women are trying to figure out how to make a difference and stop worrying about what they can’t control and do what they can”.

As for Steele’s advice to a woman who might be toiling with an idea for a business, a non-profit or any out of the box concept:

“My advice is to take the next step,” she said. “ Take counsel from others, but go for it. You never know how meaningful your contribution may be unless you have the chance to run with it. Your “little” idea may just make an enormous Impact!”

Her most important message to members though, is one of hope: “You are changing the world!” ■