Celebrating Our Alumni: Don Wilks

When alumnus Don Wilks left his role as Deloitte’s National Director of Business Insurance Consulting, his plan was to travel the world. But spending time with a Nepalese college student, during a hike to Mt. Everest’s base camp, led him to pursue another passion – building primary and secondary schools in remote areas of Nepal.

As founder and President of The Global Community for Education (GCE), Don now leads a team which works with local Nepalese communities to build, replace, and expand schools in remote areas, allowing hundreds of children who wouldn’t otherwise have access to schools to receive an education. In 2014, GCE expanded its mission to provide higher education scholarships and now has 10 students attending college.

We caught up with Don to learn more about his career journey.

Tell us a little about The Global Community for Education?
GCE started as a simple project in 2005 to fund Tanka’s pay-it-forward idea to build a primary school. In 2007, I returned to Nepal and was amazed at the impact this little school had – not only on the children who previously had no school to attend – but on the entire community. It suddenly dawned on me that these Grade 5 students would have no secondary school to attend, so we built one. In 2010, I spent a month teaching English and experiencing the full impact of these schools. That’s when GCE became a passion.

What is your current role and what are you responsible for?
I am President and oversee all operations, but my primary role is fundraising. Virtually all of GCE’s funding is from individual donors. I also assist in the creation and monitoring of project budgets, oversee the scholarship program, and do all the necessary work associated with keeping our 501(c)3 nonprofit status in good standing.

Did Deloitte help you prepare for this role?
Definitely, but I learned so much at Deloitte there is not a short answer to that question. If I had to say one thing, it would be managing multiple projects and people simultaneously. GCE often has a dozen balls in the air at the same time, and Deloitte taught me how to make sure they all get caught.

Unfortunately, on April 25, 2015 my GCE role became very similar to my Deloitte practice doing disaster recovery consulting work: a massive 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck 13 miles from two of our schools. We coordinated seven relief runs in the weeks after the earthquake, built Temporary Learning Centers to get our kids back into class, and are helping the communities with issues around water and sanitation. We have repaired three schools but one is destroyed, and we are now raising the funds to rebuild it.

What was a favorite part of your time at Deloitte?
I hate selecting “favorites” so I have to list three. First, the quality of the people. I knew I could assign a job to someone and that it would get done correctly and on time. Second, the successful completion of a project and a happy client.

And third – although many may think me sick – the travel. I saw a lot of the USA and the world helping clients, and I always made sure I experienced a bit of wherever I was. My experience at Deloitte really cemented my passion for travel.

Do you still keep in touch with former colleagues/friends from your time at Deloitte?
Absolutely. I have numerous Deloitte colleagues, many of whom I call friends and see on a social basis, and every few months a group of ex-consulting partners convene in the Dallas area to re-tell tall tales from days long past.

This profile is part of an ongoing series of interviews with alumni. Mr. Wilks’ participation is solely for educational purposes based on his knowledge of the subject and the views expressed by him are solely his own. This interview should not be deemed or construed to be for the purpose of soliciting business for GCE nor does Deloitte advocate or endorse the services or products provided by GCE.