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## In conversation: Rebecca Robins discusses philanthropy with Do One Better's Alberto Lidj

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Rebecca Robins

By [Rebecca Robins](#)

Rebecca Robins is a recognized global expert and adviser in brands, leadership and cultures of excellence, best-selling author and board trustee. Founder of the [Ways of Seeing blog](#), she works with leading brands and organizations across the world, including Dior, Burberry, LVMH, AstraZeneca, British Airways, LEGO and Reuters, alongside founder and family businesses.

In this conversation with Alberto Lidj, founder of philanthropy platform and podcast Do One Better, London-based [Ms. Robins](#) discusses philanthropy, family offices and multi-generational giving, among other topics.

Alberto, you have worked with a number of transformative foundations across the world, including The Novak Djokovic Foundation. Tell us about how you came to get involved in a more profound way with philanthropy?

I was born in Argentina, lived in the U.S., Canada, Switzerland and Luxembourg, and now in the U.K., which is home. And that context is important to me, as my perspective throughout my life has always been international.

Earlier in my career I was working a lot with HNW individuals, as they were looking to opportunities in emerging markets. And what was happening, over time, was that many of those conversations evolved towards a deeper interest in going beyond a financial return with a social return.

This was impact investing at its nascent stages. And it made me think long and hard about why we're here, about what the real purpose is. And it was the catalyst for how I moved into philanthropy.

And you got involved with some remarkable foundations, which were much of the focus of that first move into philanthropy.

Yes, foundations were a very big part of it.

One of the foundations that I was especially moved by was The Novak Djokovic Foundation, where I was global CEO.

As you know, the focus of the foundation is on early childhood development and education.

At the time I had been working as director of development at The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award Foundation where we were serving 1.3 million young people across 130 countries.

I joined part way through the Djokovic Foundation journey, where Novak's brand had created a platform for us to do some great things, from building schools to delivering high-quality teacher training. And it had a really potent voice, and ambassador in Novak, also as a UNICEF International Goodwill Ambassador.

In 2019 you launched something quite special, in giving voice to some of the great work that you have had the privilege to see, in launching your podcast Do One Better.

Yes, Do One Better first went on air in 2019. And we kept a beat every Monday even through COVID. It's inspired by the convergence of philanthropy, sustainability and social entrepreneurship.

And what's the story behind the name?

Yes, you touched on it it's a call to action. We can all do one better. I also wanted it to be a knowledge hub, so it's about open sourcing case studies for everyone to learn from.

I know this is probably a hard ask, but I'd love to go deeper into some of the conversations on your podcast. You've interviewed such an eclectic cast of people over the past four years with names recognized the world over, from Julia Gillard, to David Lynch, to Paul Polman, and organizations such as The LEGO Foundation and The Aga Khan Foundation. If you had to choose three to share with our readers, what would they be, and why?

You're right, it's one of the toughest questions to be asked when I think about the amazing conversations that I'm privileged to have on Do One Better.

Every one of them matters in the world, and is making a difference.

I have reflected on it a lot since we last talked, and I have chosen examples across very different areas, with different histories for example, one foundation is very young.

I've also reflected on examples within commercial organizations. The people and stories that I'd like to share with you all today are Siya and Rachel, and the Kolisi Foundation, Doug Griffiths and the OAK Foundation and some of the work at The Intercontinental Hotel Group. They all speak from the heart, are highly inspirational and they firmly consider the next generation and our common humanity.

The OAK Foundation are a remarkable leader.

Back in 2019, when I was interviewing the president, Doug Griffiths, they were granting \$300 million each year across gender, education, human rights.

Doug himself is a former U.S. diplomat and ambassador to Mozambique. And, perhaps, the most striking thing about the conversation was the care that goes into those grantees and the people they are supporting.

It very much comes back to that whole notion of empathy that you have talked about in a deep way.

It's about how we tell truth to power. And it's something that we see more prevalent in today's narrative.

When we think about the shape of philanthropy, we have ambitious SDG targets for 2030 and we are not going to be able to achieve it without private sector engagement.

So this is why I also chose the episode with the Intercontinental Hotel Group, who have a portfolio of 6,000 hotels. And the questions they're asking are: how do we decarbonize a footprint of over 1 million hotel rooms? How do we leverage AI to reduce food waste? How do we change the portfolio to use renewable energy?

It was fascinating to get an insight into that, because it's an industry insight that we need into the operational dynamics to inform a credible roadmap to net zero.

There is this sense of feeling relevant, of leaving a legacy that runs through all these conversations. And The Kolisi Foundation is a special conversation for me, because it's about transforming lives in South Africa and addressing inequality.

The Kolisi Foundation has only been around since 2020 they are a very young foundation and born through the challenges of COVID.

Siya, the cofounder, is the first black captain of the Springboks, the South Africa rugby team, and is a national icon

who has become a force for good.

It was through opportunities in education that he was able to transform his own way of looking at things. And trust-based philanthropy very much came into the lexicon through the pandemic.

We also started to see more removing of restrictions, which reformed the way we think about philanthropy today.

I am always interested in what's happening across generations. How does that manifest in the work that you do and in your conversations?

I love that you raise that point, as we very much see a rise in this intergenerational dynamic in the family office space in family philanthropy. It's here that we see different vantage points and different experiences.

The question is, how these vantage points and experiences can add value together.

Earlier this year, I led a panel discussion on legacy and philanthropy at a 300-year-old law firm. And, ultimately, philanthropy is a great forum to bring families together, to bring generations together. It's a powerful unifying force towards change for good.

Do One Better is fast approaching its 250<sup>th</sup> edition. How are you reflecting on that marker, and what is your biggest wish? Or, perhaps, a call to action?

Our latest conversations are touching on some really big issues, with Enver Solomon, CEO of The Refugee Council and Vicky Fox, CEO of The U.K. Supreme Court.

These are powerful conversations on the work they do and advocacy on diversity. Some of this is very difficult work, but it's highly consequential and that's why it matters so much.

The 17 U.N. Sustainable Development Goals are inextricably intertwined with each other, and 2030 is closing in extremely quickly.

My wish is that these 250-plus interviews and case studies I've created will inform, enthuse and inspire others to take positive action, wherever they may be in the world, whatever their context, in a way that is more appropriate for the challenges that surround them.

I would love to hear from anyone who is doing even more multidisciplinary work.

Do One Better was always about enabling us all to become better informed and to do make it easier for us to do something about it.

Thank you, Alberto for sharing your story, for enabling us to gain a better insight into commitments to change for good and into how we can all do one better! [Alberto Lidji](#) is also a partner at Anderson Quigley, specializing in board and executive search in social impact and sustainability.

Tune in to [Do One Better](#)

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