

Lasting philanthropic effect of the CEO SleepOut

 By Leigh Andrews

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Bernard Fehon, international entrepreneur and founder of the CEO SleepOut global brand, has jetted in to Johannesburg, the scene for the second ever CEO SleepOut on the Nelson Mandela Bridge - yes, it's set to be the coldest night of the year - and that's the point.

In an exclusive interview, Fehon shared the history of the CEO SleepOut and its uniqueness over other fundraising events typically held at night.

For one thing, while only in its second year locally, CEO SleepOut has been running globally for over a decade now, with the first rendition taking place in Sydney back in June 2006, following a few months of planning. That's true staying power, as is the fact that the global funds raised snowball heavily each time it's held – so much so that Ornico actually brought home international AMEC awards for partnering with last year's local CEO SleepOut campaign, for excellence in communications measurement and evaluation.



Fehon attributes the global campaign's success to its uniqueness. It marries the typical concept of high-profiled citizens raising funds for the needy at night, not with a frankly inappropriate fancy catered dinner and ballgowns, but instead with having them experience a night of homelessness first hand – out in the cold, on the bridge, and raising funds by doing so, much in the way that schools raise funds by hosting sleepovers on their grounds.

Secondly, the CEO SleepOut is by no means just a 'single night' CSI event. It's a factor of lasting CSR success, as Fehon explains the experience actually changes the way CEOs think. It brings these critical social issues firmly into focus for them instead of having them swept under the corporate rug.

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That's the ultimate benefit for businesses that take part in the SleepOut – the fact that it's the C-suite that gets involved, not just the company's marketing department looking for a quick reputational boost. In fact, Fehon says the SleepOut has such a profound effect on some CEOs that they go on from the experience to identify issues in their own staff that could lead to homelessness down the line. A CEO SleepOut doesn't just raise funds, it raises **awareness**.

This is especially important as SA's designated month for CSR-centricity comes to an end and the majority of businesses typically put their CSI thinking back in the box for another year. It's especially fitting where government actually mandates corporate social consciousness, so the movement shifts from mere compliance to 'creating conscious capital' in initiating change and empowering the local community.

In 2010, Ali Gregg noted the impact of CEO SleepOut while in Sydney, grasped the ethos and enormous impact it could have in SA, and set about planning last year's initial local event. In total, 247 CEOs took part and over R26m was raised in funds. That's an incredibly high fundraising bar to beat, but we just might do it. Here's hoping this year's event is even more effective.

[Click here](#) for more on the 2016 Sun International CEO SleepOut, taking place on Thursday, 28 July, on the Nelson Mandela Bridge in Johannesburg and [here for more](#) on Ornico's AMEC award-winning involvement with the initial run of the SA campaign.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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