

## So, Why Would a Klutz Like Me Sell Soccer Balls?

By Mal Warwick

When Tim Jahnigen and Lisa Tarver approached me late in 2009 with their idea for a new, mission-driven business, I knew instantly that they had the makings of a truly magical enterprise. A magical *social enterprise*.

With financial backing from his friend Sting, Tim had invented and successfully field-tested the virtually indestructible One World Futbol, which never goes flat and never needs a pump—a brilliant response to the tens of millions of inflatable soccer balls that get punctured every year on the rough terrain of refugee camps, war zones, poor villages, and slums throughout the Global South. Through a Buy One / Give One offer and other means, Tim and Lisa hoped that their proposed new venture, the [One World Futbol Project](#), would permit them to donate millions of One World Futbols to schools, orphanages, and recreation programs serving disadvantaged children living there.

In the years since then, I've been asked several times why a guy like me is selling soccer balls—someone without a single athletic bone in his body and practically no interest at all in sports—but I was hooked from the start. Because of my background and experience, Tim's and Lisa's idea for a mission-driven business to benefit poor people in the Global South was a natural. I'd served for nearly four years as a Peace Corps Volunteer in rural Ecuador in the 1960s and spent years engaged in community organizing and community politics in Berkeley in the 1970s. Also, I'd flown almost a million miles around the world to teach fundraising and marketing to nonprofit organizations, many of them working in places we later targeted to distribute the One World Futbol.

It was clear from the outset that Tim's and Lisa's venture could never raise the huge sums necessary to manufacture and deliver millions of balls through donations. Unquestionably, the operation needed to be organized as a *business*. Without ongoing profits, the company couldn't possibly sustain itself long enough to realize its mission—to bring the power of play to disadvantaged children throughout the world. It was equally clear that One World Futbol couldn't be set up as a traditional business focused primarily on the financial

bottom line. The company's primary market was among people who couldn't afford to buy soccer balls. Neither Tim nor Lisa had any interest in that approach, anyway. The only sensible approach was to organize their new venture as a *B Corporation*.

A [B Corporation](#) is a for-profit company that regards profit as only *one* of the reasons for doing business. To become certified as a B Corp, a company needs to pass a rigorous test that examines its business practices and policies—*proving* that it's taking into account the interests of its employees, its customers, the community or communities where it does business, and the environment as well as those of its owners or shareholders.

In twenty states, there are already laws in place that establish *benefit corporations* (the legal term for B Corporations) as a new way to organize a business; legislators in sixteen other states are working on such bills. These laws offer a way for companies to prove to the public that they're not green-washing—and to open doors to impact investors eager to support companies that work to make the world a better place. What Tim and Lisa were trying to accomplish with the One World Futbol Project made it an ideal B Corp candidate. Without a great deal of muss and fuss, then, the Project was established as a Limited Liability Company (LLC) and then certified as a B Corp the day it opened for business July 7, 2010.

In the nearly four years since then, the Project has distributed more than 800,000 One World Futbols in over 160 countries at last count. We'll pass the one million mark later this year, helping an estimated 25 million children living in harsh communities around the world. Our Buy One / Give One offer has enabled the company to donate tens of thousands of balls. Discounted bulk sales to nonprofit organizations have accounted for many more. But the lion's share of the distribution is the result of our sponsorship by Chevrolet, which has pledged to underwrite the production and distribution of 1.5 million One World Futbols over three years.

It's incredible to think about how many individuals have already been positively impacted by the ball. I want to encourage others who would like to share the joy I feel when I learn about another far-away community where children are now

playing with One World Futbols. To get a feeling for what we're about, simply go to [One World Futbol Project](#), where you can [Buy One / Give One](#) or [Just Give one or more](#)—and help keep play alive for youth living in harsh environments around the world.

*Mal Warwick is the coauthor with Paul Polak of [The Business Solution to Poverty](#) and, with Ben Cohen of Ben & Jerry's, [Values-Driven Business: How to Change the World, Make Money, and Have Fun](#). He is a partner in the One World Futbol Project LLC and founder and chairman of Mal Warwick / Donordigital, a fundraising consultancy for nonprofits.*