

# Giving Sets Randi Shade Apart

By Barbara Wray

I knew I was going to like Randi Shade when I watched her order coffee. Unbending to the protocol of tall, grande or venti at the corner Starbucks, she calmly repeated her request for "one medium cup of coffee." And she got it.

"Seeing a need and meeting it by bringing the right resources together is what motivates me most," Shade says. "Being able to do that with increasing levels of success is my mission. It's what I do now just about every day. I want and need to be a whole lot better at doing it, though."

Shade's friends lovingly describe her as a bulldog. Charitygift is but one example of her tenacity. In 1999, Shade founded the company following a friend's funeral after discovering how time-consuming and expensive it is to honor a request for charitable donations. She sold Charitygift to a larger enterprise that soon shut down operations. Shade and three previous employees refused to let the idea die. She bought back the lap-sized box of intellectual property – she still has the box – and pressed forward, intent on diverting into charitable organizations a percentage of dollars spent by Americans on toss-away gifts.

While charitable giving is nothing new, Charitygift recently was awarded a patent for its distinctive twist of allowing an honoree to designate a recipient charity and has distributed more than \$1 million to 5,000 charities across the country. Whether honoring an individual or thanking an associate for a business referral, the Charitygift approach is catching on.

"My partners and I have defied the odds by staying in business, and I am very proud of what we've done," she says. "The only way we'll ever get the concept to grow to a scale that gets it out of the garage and into the mainstream, though, will be to find a powerful distribution partner. I've got to make that happen."

For people who know Shade, the success of Charitygift is simply a matter of time. Patti Summerville, a principal of TateAustin, met Shade five years ago. "She sets goals and meets them, do or die," she says. "She decided she wanted her venture to marry her love of community and desire to give back. Randi started Charitygift within the year."

And Charitygift is one small part of

what Shade manages to squeeze into a week. By day, Shade is executive director of Austin Entrepreneurs Foundation. When a company joins the foundation, it donates an equity stake that becomes part of a fund if the company goes public or is sold. The foundation manages the fund, using it for charitable works.

Shade, with an MBA from Harvard, also serves on the boards of Austin Community Development Corporation, UT Hillel Foundation and UT Commission on 125. Research panel members for conferences around the country, and there's a strong likelihood Shade's name will be found – and that includes the Web site for the White House.

Shade holds the distinction of having worked for both Texas Gov. Ann Richards and Gov. George W. Bush. She is the youngest person in the country to hold the position of founding executive director of the Texas Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service, which launched AmeriCorps in Texas. Under Shade's leadership, Texas was awarded \$55 million, which was more funding for community service than any other state. She recently was appointed by Gov. Rick Perry to serve in a similar capacity as a volunteer.

"Randi Shade is one of the most creative and energetic people that I have ever met," says Richards. "She made AmeriCorps in Texas one of the preeminent in the country, and it was copied by a number of other states. Texas received rewards and recognition as a consequence of her work. She has a focus and doggedness and will be successful at whatever she does."

One of Shade's greatest strengths is building long-lasting relationships. Summerville realized she had a new friend when Shade showed up with matzo ball soup when Summerville was sick after knowing her just a short time. "She makes people feel special," says Summerville. "Maintaining relationships is the foundation from which

everything else grows."

When she was 10, Shade knew she would attend the University of Texas. She knew because she had decided it would be so. Elected student body president for 1987-1988, she also was president of Sigma Delta Tau sorority.

"She was this incredibly refreshing young woman, packaged in this denim jacket: focused, articulate and accessible," says Sara Beechner, managing director of Austin-based EnviroMedia, who met Shade at UT. "She spoke to the issues and was just herself."

Says Sharon Justice, retired UT dean of students: "Randi always wore that



denim jacket everywhere she went. She's unconventional, always right outside the box." Justice served as advisor to one of the first in a string of entities that Shade would initiate. Shade brought together six women on campus, each powerful in her own way. The group was called PHB, for Power Hungry Bitches, explains Justice with a grin. "Fifteen years later, these women have continued to make a difference in their communities. It's a real honor to be a part of their group."

PHB or not, Shade is all about giving. And her work has provided her many opportunities to do so.

"I've never seen her have to be #1 – although she ends up that way," says Justice. "She's forever bringing others along, asking what she can do for them. There's no selfishness at all." ★

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