

Wayne Elsey



Wayne Elsey was sitting at home watching television coverage of the deadly impact of the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 when he saw a single shoe wash up on shore. Having spent his professional life in the shoe industry, that simple visual changed everything. As Wayne puts it, "I felt an immediate urge and compulsion to do something to help, although I had no idea what one person could do." I may have known how to work the sales floor and consistently improve the bottom line - but I was a beginner when it came to charity". Elsey orchestrated the collection of over 250,000 pairs of new shoes and had them delivered to people in areas impacted by the tsunami. The next year, when hurricane Katrina hit the United States, Elsey spearheaded an effort that collected nearly one million pairs of shoes for victims of Hurricane Katrina. Shortly thereafter, he founded [Soles4Souls](#) (S4S), a Nashville based charity that has amassed and distributed over 19 million pairs of shoes to people in need in over 127 countries.

Elsey started working in the footwear industry at the age of 15 as stock boy for GallenKamp Shoes in Fredericksburg, Virginia. One year later, he was the only "16-year-old he knew who made \$25,000 a year on \$2 an hour and lots of commissions." Wayne continued working at the store full-time until he graduated from Stafford High School in 1983. At the age of 20, Elsey took an entry level position at Stride Rite Corporation where he quickly moved up the ladder to become the youngest Regional Vice President of Stride Rite at the age of 25. Wayne's career in the footwear industry continued in a myriad of manufacturing, managerial, sales and marketing positions. From 1999 to 2004 Elsey served as President/CEO of Footwear Specialties International (FSI) managing the growth and development of the company and its brands. Under Elsey's tenure, FSI grew over 400 percent in revenue. In 2005, Elsey was named President of Kodiak - Terra USA where he remained until becoming the Founder and CEO of charitable organization Soles4Souls in 2007.

Under Elsey's guidance as CEO of Soles4Souls flourished and in four short years quickly emerged as one of the top 1% of nonprofit organizations in the United States. To date, S4S has distributed over 19 million pairs of shoes in 127 countries to victims of natural disasters and abject poverty. A 2007 [article](#) on Soles4Souls in the Virginia newspaper, *The Free Lance-Star*, reported that "Those who knew Elsey when he lived in Hartwood aren't surprised by his success or his big heart. Jackie Busch, his English teacher, saw those traits when Elsey was a teen. For instance, when he overheard a classmate tell Busch she kept having car trouble, Elsey paid to have the car fixed. 'He would very quietly help anyone he could, with no expectation of being paid back,' Busch said. 'He was just a good kid.' George Carter, Elsey's first boss, at the Fredericksburg shoe store, praised Wayne as being a "go-getter" and noted that "Soles4Souls will do well with Elsey at the helm." "He will make it successful," said Carter, "No doubt."

In 2010, Wayne published the book, [*Almost Isn't Good Enough*](#), which has become a guidepost for charity executives and directors who want to inject the innovation and drive found in corporate board rooms into their own organizations. Grammy Award winning artist Amy Grant praised the book as showing "how to transform a single act of kindness into a tidal wave of love and hope."

In early 2012 Wayne decided to step down as CEO of Soles4Souls in order to direct his professional efforts along a new path. Upon his departure, the Soles4Souls board of directors issued a statement saying, "Wayne has accomplished something that many people aspire to, but only a very rare few achieve. He's made the world a better place. His efforts have improved the lives of millions of people, most of whom were hurting and desperate and lacking basic essentials like shoes on their feet. For hundreds of thousands more fortunate individuals, he's galvanized us to a new level of charity and caring for others. We are grateful for Wayne's complete dedication to founding and growing this fantastic organization."

After leaving S4S, Wayne soon launched [Wayne Elsey Enterprises](#) (WEE), a portfolio company that works with nonprofit and for profit organizations on strategy, branding and development. According to Elsey, "WEE is a full service enterprise that enables nonprofits to learn, grow and do more. Our focus is on imparting the principals, strategies and tactics that helped make Soles4Souls the highly successful organization that it is today." WEE is structured into 3 divisions: strategic, educational and fundraising. The [Strategic Division](#) consults with organizations to strengthen identity, expand upon it and drive success. The educational division, [501\(c\)\(3\) University](#), is an online educational site designed to give nonprofit leaders the knowledge and understanding to take their organization to the next level. The third and newest division of WEE is [Funds2Orgs](#), a [social enterprise](#) that provides turnkey solutions to engaging volunteers and creating powerful events that drive funds for nonprofit organizations by collecting, distributing and repurposing discarded articles such as shoes, clothing, purses, cell phones and other electronic goods. The Funds2Orgs business model offers three compelling advantages: 1. Provides domestic nonprofits the ability to raise funds by carrying out engaging programs; 2. Creates and sustains micro-enterprise opportunities for low-income entrepreneurs in developing nations; and 3. Dramatically reduces the impact of post-consumer waste in our nation's landfills.

Today Elsey continues to be involved in charities around the world. When not working to change lives throughout the world and shape the scope of nonprofit outreach, Wayne cherishes the time spent with his daughter Melissa who remains his number one priority. He also enjoys riding his jet ski near his home in sunny Orlando, FL and hanging out with close friends. A firm believer in the power of the human connection to bring about change, you can connect with Wayne and follow his activities on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Pinterest](#), [Google+](#), [YouTube](#) & [Vimeo](#).

