

In the business of giving back

Broker shares his blueprint for building good will



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Michael Pink has the instincts of an entrepreneur and the heart of a do-gooder. He says he's harnessed the power of the deal in real estate to raise about \$275,000 for charities over the last 14 years, and the broker wants to make it easier for others in the business, his direct competitors, to follow his example.

Pink and his wife, Sharon Porter, run MAP Real Estate Inc. They help mostly small- to mid-sized companies find office space around downtown. They have a long-standing commitment to give back part of their commissions — their standard donation lately has been 20 percent — to a charity of each client's choice.

It's how Pink distinguishes his service from the pack while getting the satisfaction of helping good causes. It's also helped him establish connections with nonprofits who are grateful for the donations, and then might call him the next time they need to negotiate a lease.

Not a bad gig, overall. It's worked so well that Pink is willing to give up any competitive advantage and institutionalize the idea of charitable giving across the real estate community.

You don't have to be in real estate to root for him or give him an assist.

Pink has started an organization called Investing in Communities. Early next year, he hopes to have a Web site active at iiconline.org. For now, he has background posted at his firm's Web site,

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Real estate broker Michael Pink is trying to get other brokers to follow his example and donate part of their commissions to charity. | JOHN H. WHITE~SUN-TIMES

maprealestate.com.

He hopes other brokers will list themselves with the organization, paying fees that have yet to be set, and thus declare their willingness to share commissions with charities. It would give them exposure and, Pink hopes, will provide customers with leverage to demand that brokers participate.

"I think that when the customer takes the reins, the customers will make a lot of brokers

happy to keep 80 percent of their commission on a deal rather than lose the deal," Pink said.

He would offer participation to brokers in residential as well as commercial real estate. So if you are buying a house, you could suggest that your Realtor sign up for a do-

nation.

One deal can generate thousands of dollars for a non-profit, assuming the broker gives back 20 percent. Pink cannot limit recipients of the gifts, but is working with educators and friends in real estate to encourage donations for five broad areas: women and girls; education, environment, arts and social justice.

Technically, the broker would give the donation to the customer, who would certify that the money is going to a charity. The broker cannot make the donation because under Illinois licensing law, that would be an illegal "sharing" of a commission.

The idea has much appeal. Real estate people are often thought of as Type A personalities with hearts of stone, but the business has a commitment to philanthropy that shames other professional fields. The best example is the \$1 million or so it raises every year for the Greater Chicago Food Depository.

But Pink will face obstacles

ROEDER REPORTS

David Roeder reports on real estate every Thursday at 6:22 p.m. on Newsradio 780 WBBM. The reports are repeated at 10:22 p.m. Thursday and 7:22 a.m. Sunday.

in getting people to join him. Some will be skeptical, others more inclined to fight for business by slashing commissions and keeping it all. Pink said his aim is to facilitate donations, not personally make money from iiconline.org.

Real estate firms have their own chairman-approved charities that will get their brokers' attention. Why share the glory with Pink?

His response: "I believe that as Investing in Communities scales up, the participants can get more exposure than they can possibly buy for themselves."

He'll also need to get partnerships from major customers. Would a drugstore or coffee chain that are always signing leases partner with Pink to ensure a donation flow?

In this season of giving, maybe Pink has found the magical mix of self-interest and altruism.

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