

Erste Bank is initiating a new form of cooperation with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and is taking part in the "Networked Worlds" project, an innovative programme that provides selected employees with the opportunity to temporarily assume management responsibility for the realisation of a social project in an NGO.

The programme centres around concrete project proposals from various NGOs. These projects are clearly defined in the form of an invitation to tender. When accepted, they are granted a management mandate, and technical support is provided by an employee in the NGO partner organisation. Each project lasts between three and six months, after which the participants return to the bank.

"We are taking part in this project to show that corporate social responsibility is more than just a buzzword, that it is something that we actively live. It is also beneficial for our employees to gain insights into worlds that they are not otherwise exposed to. Of course, we also expect to reap benefits from our participation in this project," says Rupert Dollinger, personnel director at Erste Bank.

At present, five employees from Erste Bank are working on projects at SOS Children's Village, the Austrian Red Cross and Light for the World. The participants' initial experiences have been very positive: "This project is valuable for my personal growth, but is also an ideal opportunity for both "worlds" to exchange experiences and create new value. I can directly apply my professional experience and gain knowledge for product development from the customer's viewpoint. It's a win-win situation," explains Kurt Tojner, an employee of Erste Bank who has been involved in the SOS Children's Village's web marketing project since January 2006.

"Networked Worlds allows participants to gain new management experience, and has proven successful in facilitating the exchange of knowledge and experiences between different worlds, for the benefit of all involved," explains Leon Lenhart, the initiator of the programme.

Other partners of Networked Worlds include the charitable organisations Caritas der Erzdiözese Vienna, Dreikönigsaktion (DKA Austria) and 4 Pforten, the companies Generali and Manpower, the CSR platform of the Federation of Austrian Industry respAct, and the project management company bestpractise. Further businesses will be able to participate in Networked Worlds projects until the end of 2006.

Further information on experiences, concrete projects and project participants can be found on the Internet at www.vernetzte-welten.at or from the project contact.

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