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Eric Kessler's family built and operated one of the country's most attractive places to work for five generations. He grew up alongside machinists and office workers at Fel-Pro, an auto-parts manufacturer outside of Chicago, which for decades offered its employees enormously generous benefits—college scholarships for workers' kids, day care, several weeks of vacation per year—and generally created an atmosphere in which employees were happy to go the extra mile for their customers.

After the family sold the company in 1998 for a reported \$750 million, then 26-year-old Kessler had the opportunity to join his family's philanthropic organization, the Family Alliance Foundation. "What I immediately learned is philanthropy isn't easy," he says. "There are lots of challenges to engaging multiple generations in philanthropy." The family-centric management style and progressive outlook on business ownership at Fel-Pro had helped prepare Kessler, but it still wasn't easy for the family to balance all the competing points of view in its foundation.

*In the years that followed, Kessler's work expanded beyond the foundation. He advocated for the advancement of democratic institutions around the world as part of the **National Democratic Institute**, was selected to manage conservation issues as a White House appointee under the Clinton administration and pressed for environmental protections with the **League of Conservation Voters**.*

*"All through this I was watching the philanthropy world," Kessler says. He saw the field begin to shift following Ted Turner's bold launch of the **United Nations Foundation** in 1998. Philanthropy was evolving into much more than attending galas and writing checks. Then the **Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation** launched in 2000, manifesting a laser-like focus on well-defined goals. "I was blown away by the fact that it was all outcome oriented," he says. Organizations like **Charity Navigator**, founded in 2001, were starting to think about bringing a more methodological approach to evaluating the efficacy of philanthropy.*

Meanwhile, although Kessler was making personal contributions, he felt a lack of direction in his own giving. Many charities seemed to lack concrete objectives, and few foundations had meticulous research or compelling expertise to guide them. Kessler wanted philanthropies to "take a businesslike approach to their programs, ensuring that every dollar has the greatest impact possible, while also allowing for risk-taking and long-term investments."

*After more than a year of researching the direction philanthropy was heading and evaluating where he could have the most impact, Kessler founded **Arabella Advisors** in 2005. He identified two major needs that he could address through his venture: research and resources. After a client has spent time choosing philanthropic goals, Arabella provides research and guidance for achieving those objectives. It looks at the impact the philanthropy has had and what areas still need attention. It also provides support for foundations and philanthropists who have a goal but lack the staffing needed to realize the potential of their work. Today, with a staff of 160, several hundred clients and billions of dollars under advisement, Arabella is the largest philanthropy consulting company in the U.S...*

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