"Be the Change" an Interview with Arabella Advisors' Eric Kessler

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Eric Kessler's family built and operated one of the country's most attractive places to visit for five generations. He grew up alongside mainstays and office workers at Fe-Pio, an auto parts manufacturer outside of Chicago, where he decided to offer employees a generous benefits package, including a company vacation for every five years, and generally created an atmosphere in which employees were happy to go the extra mile for their customers.

After the company sold the company in 1996 and was sold for $750 million, then-25-year-old Kessler had the opportunity to join his family's philanthropic organization, the Family Alliance Foundation. "I initially learned in philanthropy isn't easy," he says. "There are a lot of challenges and opportunities to be engaged in multiple generations of philanthropy. The family office's management, due to progressive business, could continue to do big things, but it still wasn't easy for the family to achieve all the competing points of view in the 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 involved in the conservation of lions as the founder of the Mara Foundation, and was a founding member of the League of Conservation Voters.

"It was the only thing I was able to do," he says. "I was able to get involved at the local level and really be a part of the conservation effort." He also worked with the Alliance Global Foundation to start the Fe-Pio Foundation, which focuses on conservation initiatives in Africa.

"Eric's work is making an impact," he says. "He's doing some great things, and they're having a big impact." Kessler's foundation works directly with the communities it serves and focuses on providing opportunities for people to work together and contribute.

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