

## Kelleher International: experts in exclusive matchmaking

For over 28 years, Amber Kelleher and Kelleher International has been creating exclusive matches



Amber Kelleher-Andrews, CEO and co-owner of high-end matchmaking outfit Kelleher International

“People see it quite simply as a way of meeting people they would not otherwise have done, and that’s really what it comes down to,” says Amber Kelleher-Andrews, CEO and co-owner of high-end matchmaking outfit **Kelleher International**. “We’ve been called the world’s most exclusive club because we accommodate a unique group of people with high ambitions,” reads the mantra of the self-styled “personal headhunter”, whose address book is littered with innumerable A-list executives.

Far from focusing solely on matchmaking, Kelleher International is embarking upon a new vision that aims to inspire those on its books and leverage their international clout in reshaping the paradigm of what constitutes good business.

“Being not only the CEO but also the co-owner, my role is to act as spokesperson and visionary for all we do. I’m doing everything from figuring out what software we’re going to use to how we’re going to design a Kelleher app. I’m hiring people and all the time managing day-to-day tasks whatever they may be,” says Kelleher-Andrews. “Having said this, I have a wonderful team behind me. With a workforce of about 50 people, we’re a pretty big matchmaking company.” Add in its recent addition of an international scouting network, and the company’s reach is even greater.

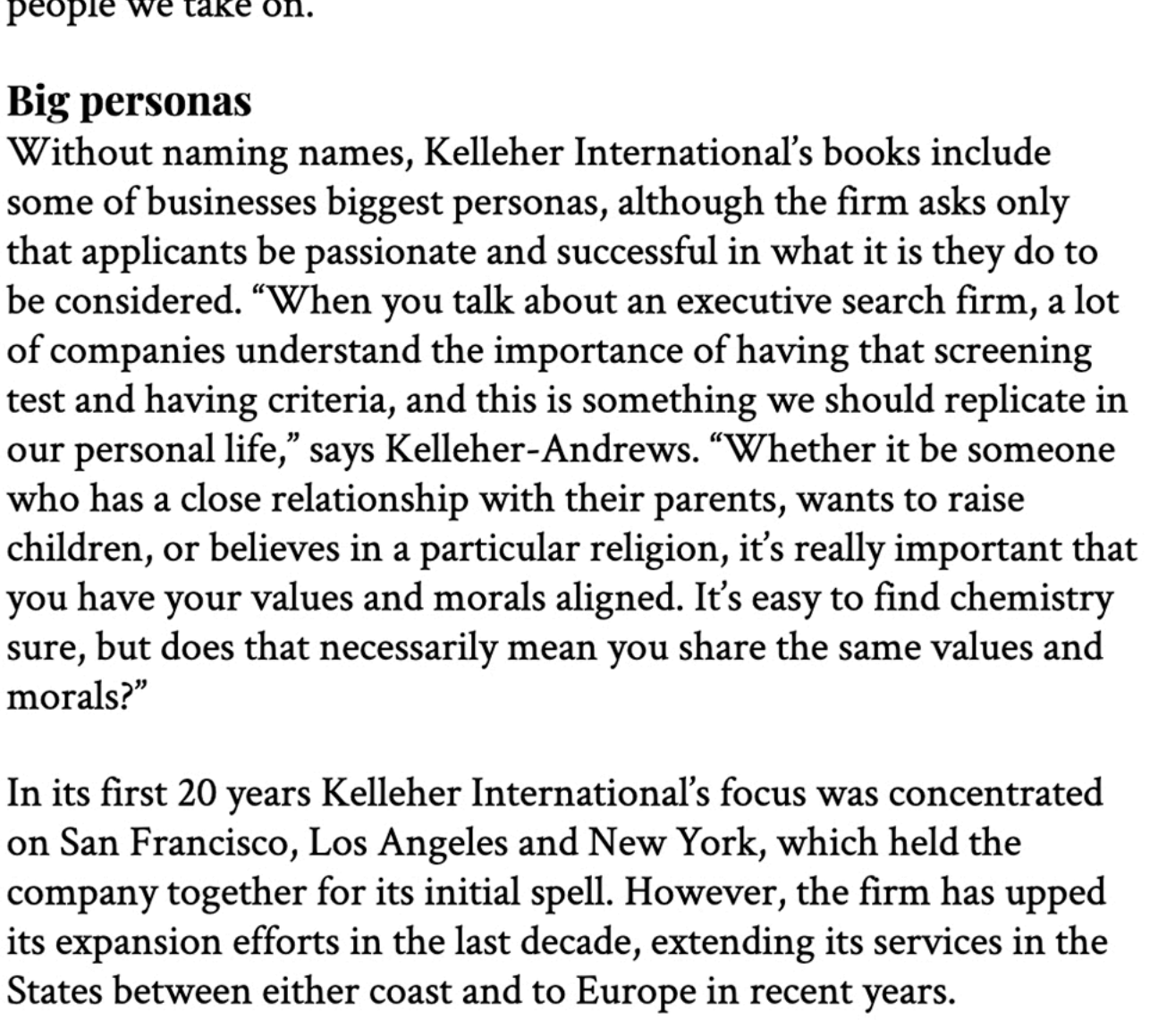
### Exclusive dating services

Founded 28 years ago by Amber Kelleher-Andrews’ mother, Jill Kelleher, Kelleher International preceded the dot-com boom by some margin and remains an unchallenged force at the forefront of the market, having established the framework

which so many would follow. “It’s a service that is very much customised to the individual and we’re able to do that because we were the first matchmaking firm on the map,” says Kelleher-Andrews. “There are a lot of companies that have started in the last five to 10 years but they fall short of that same longevity, experience and creativity we have.”

Although the matchmaking market is so often seen as overcrowded, Kelleher International occupies an exclusive spot in the dating space and of the 1,000 people that apply to the service every month only around 25 are accepted as actual clients. “The remainder stay in our network on a complimentary bases as part of our ever-growing global network. In this sense we work very much like an executive search firm, and I think people really relate to that. If you were looking to hire a CFO you’re not going to look in the produce department of your local grocery store, yet we tend to think that we’re going to meet the person we spend the rest of our lives with in this same random sense, it’s kind of like we’ve put business first.”

The methods by which couples are matched are of course complicated in nature, though certain parameters are universal, explains Kelleher-Andrews, “We look for someone who is really content with who they are. I think that too often people wait to meet their significant other in order to be happy and in my experience that does not work. There’s a certain readiness for a relationship and a certain mentality and emotional stability that is required of our clients. So when I’m interviewing someone I’m almost looking for someone who says, ‘I’m perfectly happy single, but what I really want is to share my life with someone.’”



Amber Kelleher-Andrews and her mother Jill Kelleher, founder of Kelleher International

The firm caters almost exclusively to high-end clients, which understandably brings its fair share of complications and misconceptions. “Just because someone has a lot of money doesn’t then mean they can date whomever they want,” says Kelleher-Andrews. “We’re not the kind of service that just works for men either, but for both genders, and it’s certainly not for rich individuals looking for an armpiece. In fact, we don’t target wealth, but rather seek out those who are passionate and very good at what they do. If they’re a brilliant entrepreneur who has a start-up that hasn’t made it yet, that doesn’t matter to me, I want to meet them anyway and possibly add them to our network.”

“Granted, to hire our firm as a client, our membership fees are expensive and they act somewhat as a very selective screening process, so when you do come onboard you’re not coming onboard with the masses by any means. Rather you’re just one of a handful of people we take on.”

### Big personas

Without naming names, Kelleher International’s books include some of businesses biggest personas, although the firm asks only that applicants be passionate and successful in what it is they do to be considered. “When you talk about an executive search firm, a lot of companies understand the importance of having that screening test and having criteria, and this is something we should replicate in our personal life,” says Kelleher-Andrews. “Whether it be someone who has a close relationship with their parents, wants to raise children, or believes in a particular religion, it’s really important that you have your values and morals aligned. It’s easy to find chemistry sure, but does that necessarily mean you share the same values and morals?”

In its first 20 years Kelleher International’s focus was concentrated on San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York, which held the company together for its initial spell. However, the firm has upped its expansion efforts in the last decade, extending its services in the States between either coast and to Europe in recent years.

Speaking about the differences between European and American clients, Kelleher-Andrews says that she was led to believe Europeans dated in close-knit groups over the blind one-on-one dates and so, for this reason, the region would be a tough nut to crack. Having established a significant arm of its operations in London however, Kelleher-Andrews has found this not to be the case and rather that the differences between cross-Atlantic counterparts are difficult to determine.

Kelleher-Andrews puts this down to the firm’s strict criteria, which are consistent no matter the geography. “Because our clients are unique they are easy to match in that they’re already compatible with our own parameters and so those of others in our network. While this is not to say that people have the same job or income, they tend to be very good at whatever it is they do and are generally doing something significant in the world, which is where the philanthropy comes in.”

### Philanthropic ventures

Kelleher stresses that the firm’s biggest achievements so far lie not with their impressive geographic gains, but with a sharpened focus on philanthropy. “Aside from the international interest we’ve garnered from primetime television show **Ready for Love**, in which I played a major part, philanthropy is really the company’s driving force at the moment. As the strategist, the spokesperson and visionary, my goal for this past year and the future is to create a different role for Kelleher International that is more in keeping with this ethos.”

On first examination the ideals of upmarket matchmaking and philanthropy share a great deal in common in that they’re each aimed at bettering people’s lives. “At any given time we have so many successful clients on our books and a wealth of people who really want to channel that into something that feels more satisfying, so philanthropy has emerged as a major opportunity for us,” says Kelleher-Andrews.

Leveraging the firm’s position as a go-to contact for many of the world’s most influential business minds, Kelleher International is asking clients to take heed of its new-found fervour for philanthropy. “Quite simply, philanthropy is a wonderful way of turning your success into significance. Being a matchmaking service we end up getting to know our clients very well. Many of our clients share secrets with us that they’re yet to tell their closest friends, and when you have that bond with someone you’re able to talk about anything. Philanthropy just so happens to be one topic that is beginning to circulate among our clientele,” says Kelleher-Andrews.

### Changing dynamics

After Kelleher-Andrews spent some time on Richard Branson’s Necker Island last summer and hearing much of what he had to say on the changing dynamics of doing business, Kelleher International has agreed to curate an event in early 2014 alongside Branson’s charity foundation Virgin Unite.

She speaks with ardour about Branson’s business philosophy that considers people and planet alongside profit. “I believe we’re ready for that change. This is 2014, everybody wants to do good whether it’s recycling or building green homes. The problem is that so many of these big corporations are lacking in this department and are refusing to change with the rest of the world. I do believe that if we continue to only focus on the bottom line then not only will the planet perish but so too will its people.”

Having experienced first-hand the urge among senior executives to inspire change and engage with philanthropy, Kelleher-Andrews is optimistic that those in attendance will seek to benefit the environment and the community wherever possible. “What Richard is doing is showing people how to leverage their influence as a force for good and really change the way they do business. By putting philanthropy before profit you’re achieving something worthwhile; those who work for you will be prouder to do so and, of course, you’re going to end up making more money in the process because people would rather lend their custom to a responsible business.”

“While I’m doing good in my business, I represent thousands of people that aren’t, and that’s when the light bulb went off and I said, I need to get my clients on this island. Most of these people own the company, are a chairman or sit on the board, and invariably have a great deal of influence in their company’s dealings. While it seems like a small thing it actually has a big impact, and that is how it began.”

### Maiden voyage

The event is scheduled to take place in 2014, at which time Kelleher-Andrews will host an intimate group of people on the island and raise funds for Virgin Unite, the non-profit foundation of the Virgin Group in the process. “It’s a big project to take on but I’m really passionate about it because, not only can I introduce people to the love of their life, but maybe I can influence different sectors of the business world and in part rid their obsession with short-term profits.

“If one of my clients owns a major corporation with a large carbon footprint and a board that remains fixated on its bottom line, then maybe I can get my client onto Necker Island and inspire them to leverage their influence as a force for good. We need to look at the triple bottom line; planet, people, profit. If we don’t move in this different direction soon the end result is an unacceptable state of affairs,” says Kelleher-Andrews. “Nothing can happen overnight, it’s big business, but I do feel people are ready. It’s about empowering them and spurring a positive change, it’s about using business as a force for good.”

How successful the event is remains to be seen, with the desired results unlikely to be tangible for years to come. Nonetheless, Kelleher-Andrews is optimistic that this event marks the beginning of a continued commitment to philanthropy and one that, if successful, could reshape the way in which corporates conduct business.

In closing, Kelleher-Andrews says with confidence, “I think there’s an innate quality in all of us that wants to do some good. We want to feel like we’ve left the planet having done something really positive.”

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