



In conversation with Frederik Paulsen:

When adventure and philanthropy meet

Deeply worried by the effects of climate change, Frederik Paulsen, a Swedish entrepreneur and explorer, now uses his many expeditions to gain a better scientific understanding of the issues, and to search for possible solutions.

As we discuss a possible learning field trip for philanthropists to Svalbard and the North Pole with explorer, philanthropist and advocate Frederik Paulsen, the question arises whether there has to be an element of danger in his own expeditions. He agrees with a laugh. Exploration is something that is close to his heart and has become the catalyst for a series of major philanthropic initiatives that are designed to help save the planet.

Paulsen has built Ferring, into a highly successful multinational biopharmaceutical company specializing in fertility treatment, while also devoting more and more time and energy to giving back to society. He is one of the most generous philanthropists I have ever had the pleasure to meet.

His commitment to the environment began 30 years ago, when he and a friend took their young sons on holiday to the Faroe Islands in the North Atlantic archipelago. "I continued on to Iceland and Greenland, and then even further up to Spitsbergen, from where the step to the North Pole wasn't so big," he said. "Once you've been to the North Pole, you have to go to the South Pole, after which I discovered the planet has another six poles." In the winter of 2013, Paulsen became the first person ever to visit all eight of the Earth's poles.

He kept returning to these places, and as he did so, the visits gradually changed in character: "While they started out as tour-

ist trips, they became increasingly challenging to execute – we needed airplanes, helicopters, boats, submarines, dog sledges and more. So with every trip, more and more researchers would take advantage of the opportunity – to the point where they entirely took over the expeditions and I was just part of the crew." The holiday visits turned into scientific expeditions, and the tourist and traveler evolved into an explorer and activist.

Developing awareness of climate change

Until the COVID-19 pandemic struck, Paulsen took part in about four expeditions a year, and increasingly had to confront a stark reality: "These journeys taught me about the environmental issues we are facing, and in particular, how the poles are being affected by rapid climate change." Witnessing the effects there-of first-hand, and discussing the problem with the scientists he met, Paulsen decided to act to ensure future generations would also be able to experience the beauty of the polar regions for themselves.

The heritage of the Paulsen family

Paulsen has no doubt about the source of his immense drive and determination. "When I get interested and passionate about something, then I want to take personal responsibility. When you promise something, you have to see it through. This grit is something I take from my upbringing."

Frederik Paulsen's grandparents were born and raised on Föhr, one of the windy, dune-swept North Frisian Islands off the German North Sea coast. Although he was born on the mainland, Paulsen's father always felt deeply connected to Föhr and spoke its Frisian dialect. During the Weimar Republic, Frederik Paulsen Senior was involved in left-wing student organizations

and was imprisoned by the Nazi government. Following his release, he fled first to Switzerland and then to Sweden, where he started his own pharmaceutical company in Malmö in 1950. That was start of the now internationally renowned Ferring Pharmaceuticals.

Paulsen inherited both his father's entrepreneurial spirit and the company, whose leadership he took over at the age of 32 – a step he describes as his "first real challenge in life". He also feels the same bond with the Frisian Islands. In 1988, Frederik Paulsen Senior founded the Ferring Foundation to help preserve the Frisian language and culture. Later, the foundation built the "Kunst der Westküste" museum and the Waleem winery, encouraging Frisian economic development and the preservation of its cultural and lingual heritage – another cause passionately supported by Paulsen.

Becoming fully engaged

Paulsen's philanthropic commitment now takes up much of his time, and goes far beyond simply funding the organizations he supports. "To me, philanthropy is really about how much you

are willing to engage – beyond just money," he explained. This means investing not just money, but also time and energy – which are often in short supply with such a wide range of activities. He helps by bringing his extensive networks and experience to bear, and by encouraging early-stage organizations to develop funding platforms that will enable them to grow. One such organization is uArctic, which facilitates research collaboration between different universities in the North. The President of uArctic said the platform and structure would be nowhere near where they are today without Paulsen's active engagement.

Paulsen has two further areas of focus in his philanthropy: the economic and social empowerment of women in Bhutan, where he has worked for the past 20 years, and reversing the trend of negative population growth in Russia by donating non-commercial fertility clinics. With all these different but highly immersive commitments, Paulsen is a unique combination of adventurer and philanthropist. Above all though, what is special about his way of giving is how committed he is to all the causes he supports – on an operational, strategic and emotional level.

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Photo: generously provided by Frederik Paulsen