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“Well-Communicated Strategic Social Responsibility Enables Human Resources to Thrive”

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When teams are engaged in meaningful civic work, it sparks a virtuous cycle for the business and the community. This is driven by the purposeful alignment between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Marketing Communications (MarComm) – a leading catalyst for strengthening a company’s employer brand.

Many functions of the human resources department are enhanced through CSR programs, such as professional and leadership development, team building, and attracting/retaining employees. By communicating these in focused ways, employees are energized and engaged, and the entire organization benefits.

In this second of a [two-part series](#), we address bottom-line improvement through socially responsible investments in all aspects of human resources. Employees are the ambassadors of their companies’ products and services. Internal communications and external reinforcement of the value of intentional civic involvement will attract, engage, train, develop, and retain productive employees and teams.

Attracting and Engaging Employees

[Project ROI](#) found that, “86% of workers believe it is important that their own employer is responsible to society and the environment.” Our current and future workforce expects civic involvement to be a valued part of their work life through volunteering, fundraising, donating, and serving in nonprofit leadership roles.

Studies show that young workers *expect* employers to partner with community organizations, including financial, hands-on, skill-based, and in-kind investments. They want to be part of a community that makes a difference in the world by bringing appropriate assets to bear, and they want to be part of a culture that values what employees can accomplish.

How do you communicate this internally the right way? Job candidates and current employees need to hear three key messages:

- 1) WHY do we as a business invest in society and what do we hope to achieve?
- 2) WHAT are the community opportunities offered to employees?
- 3) HOW does the company culture recognize and value civic participation and leadership?

Here are some communications strategies to address that:

- Dedicate space for the company's CSR program in appropriate customer or public-facing communications, including your website, business development collateral, blogs, and social media.
- Include CSR philosophies in all internal communications to highlight service and impact –employee manual, company intranet, e-newsletter feature stories, pictures on social media of volunteer projects, employee awards for civic leadership roles, kick-off meetings & events, etc.
- Create and distribute content about the charity partner and its cause that features your employees and/or products side-by-side with the nonprofit's beneficiaries; this can tell your story through traditional and social media.

Training and Developing Employees

Meaningful CSR programs open the doors for more, different, and less expensive training and development programs for employees. Meeting management, public speaking, and networking skills are some of the early benefits of nonprofit involvement. Board training and board service are opportunities at the more senior levels.

Management consulting guru, Peter Drucker said, "The best training for a young manager is to serve in a community organization." Teach employees to develop relationships in the community; this will serve them both professionally and personally. It starts with volunteering which can be followed by program leadership, event chairmanship, fundraising for a cause, to eventual board service.

Supporting these opportunities as a company creates buy-in and sustainable employee involvement. Communicating these strategies well is the catalyst to that outcome:

- Include community commitments in personnel reviews, not to punish those who spend their energy elsewhere, but to reward those who lead in ways that benefit the business.
- Discuss civic service as a conduit for improving work performance or leadership capability. Challenged by public speaking? Join a fundraising committee to practice pitching the organization's cause. Trouble running meetings? Join a non-profit committee to see how it's done and emulate it. Need to build a network? Attend charitable events to meet people on common ground.
- Create opportunities for employees to use their expertise or the company's products to address a social need. Professional services firms participate in pro bono work; tradespeople build homes; retailers use products in the field; manufacturers improve operations.

Fostering Teamwork and Productivity

CSR programs can reduce a company's turnover rate by up to 50 percent, and can potentially increase productivity by up to 13 percent (Babson College, 2016), but employees need to know about them and rally behind the initiatives. Promoting volunteerism builds cohesion and allows information, perspective, and ideas to flow seamlessly across the organization.

But lead by example. When bosses serve on nonprofit boards, participate in company volunteer projects, and talk about the value of service, most people will follow. When team members feel they are part of something larger that matters, they are inspired to do their jobs even better. Leverage metrics – volunteer hours, cans collected, money raised – to tell your company's story of doing good, and use this information to incentivize entire departments or create a friendly location-based competition. Establish an internal Service Award that is lauded as a really big deal by senior leadership, and recognize those participants through social media so they can share with their networks.

There are many communications strategies that can enhance these efforts and drive further buy-in:

- Incorporate messages into *every communications opportunity* possible – posters in the break rooms, orientation and training messaging, store-level and departmental meetings, regional events, HR calls for benefits, etc.
- Share often the answers to the questions: What did we do? What did we accomplish? What did we learn? Investors, customers, employees, and other stakeholders will take notice and take interest.
- Create feature stories of exemplary teamwork and cross-department/cross-level cooperation, and use pictures, testimonials, and data to tell the story.

In an [earlier piece](#), we explored the revenue side of CSR programs and the communications that enable their success in the areas of brand differentiation, new products and services, and new markets (locations and audiences). Our purpose for this article was to round out those front-of-the-house business levers with strategies for employees and teams.

From a marketing perspective, thoughtful community engagement is a foundational pillar for motivating an organization and energizing its employee base. Recognize your programs and reward those who are championing its efforts both internally and externally. By expertly marketing corporate social responsibility programs, your employer brand – the relationship among your organization, its employees, and potential new hires – can really shine.

About the authors

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