

These days and forevermore, nearly every business is “global” in some way: operations, customers, suppliers. Corporate Hartz has served a number of international companies including Intercontinental Hotels Group (IHG), H-P, Merial, Cisco, and recently Novelis.

No matter what the industry or organizational footprint, the refrains are, “each of our locations is *unique*” or “customers in each market are very *different* from one another.” Hearing this always takes me back to the mid-1990’s at The Home Depot – always trying to balance scale with local needs. Yes, we sold more snow-blowers in the Northeast and more cacti in the Southwest, but there was also variation in tastes (e.g., Dallas v Portland). What remains with me still is that the customers are all *exactly the same* – they buy what they want and need. Market differences are merely logistical hurdles to creatively leap.

In corporate social responsibility strategy work, I advocate “GLOCAL.” This buzzword means that companies must lead and manage simultaneously at global and local levels. Within our sphere of influence, we can generate ideas for community engagement and environmental sustainability which drive success at both levels. We can also create programs which improve *something* for our employees and customers. Because, at a basic level, people are all *exactly the same* – they act on their own wants and needs. Cultural differences are merely logistical hurdles to creatively leap.

How come many executives forget their MBA lessons when they start to think about community engagement as a for-profit strategy? How come they are sometimes willing to invest many millions of dollars in a facility with a 10-year payback period, but are reluctant to invest a few in the ROI of improved employee relationships, government affairs, vendor partners, advocacy positions, brand affinity, AND cost reduction?

My opinion is that this phenomenon happens because the issue of “charity” is fraught with emotions, passions, biases, politics, and assumptions. This is especially true with respect to international communities: we contemplate them as monolithic regions; we generalize them by race; we judge them not as better or worse, but as different.

- “The Europeans are all socialist and leave everything to the government.”
- “The Chinese have bigger fish to fry; they don’t care about the things we do.”
- “Franchisees in Mexico don’t believe in corporate social responsibility.”

These and other protests prevent executives from seeing the *benefits*.

- Recycling and re-using our waste stream saves dump fees and allows us to lead in landfill diversion, an important environmental issue.
- Funding children’s hospitals serves everyone and connects us with influencers.
- Promoting literacy develops skilled employees and wise customers. (And, smart shoppers always pick *our* products and services, don’t they?)

International social responsibility seems more challenging on the face of it, but often times it offers opportunities for really big wins in the unlikeliest of places. For PRG-Schultz, I created the world’s first *global* Job Shadow Day in partnership with Junior Achievement International. Employees and communities from every corner of the earth – Sydney, Jakarta, Sao Paulo, and Calgary embraced the program. Excitement, impact, and press followed in nearly every market. *People are more the same than different.*