

This issue of *Hartz & Minds* shares a portion of an article Richard Branson, founder and chairman of Virgin Group, wrote for the May issue of *Entrepreneur* magazine. The full text can be found at: www.entrepreneur.com/article/226719.

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Richard Branson on the Business Benefits of Volunteering

Combining employees' volunteer work with exercise is great for business and the community, boosting relationships, [health](#), and [morale](#). Spending time together [at the Pick n Pay Cape Argus charity bike race in Cape Town, South Africa] got our team talking about how we at Virgin can use the power of sport and business to promote good causes and raise money for charity. It also set my mind whirring about the possibilities for other entrepreneurs to use such events to make an impact on their communities.

First, as our experience showed, it's important that everyone in your business is involved, including the leadership team. Everyone needs to be able to take breaks for fun and exercise, and your company needs to have a healthy, engaged and creative workforce if you're going to get ahead of your competition. Make sure that your employees have options to choose from: Some will want to join a corporate team to compete in a race or challenge, others will want to help organize events, and others may simply want to help raise money.

While some may dismiss your efforts as a distraction, such cooperation outside the office will be a key builder of your company's culture, creating a real competitive advantage for years to come – we at Virgin have found this to be the case. [The events we sponsor] increase the awareness of the Virgin brand in one form or another, but importantly, they raise money for charity, and connect our companies to local markets and communities.

More than that, volunteer work can stimulate enterprising ideas, some of which may be applicable to your business someday. One of our partners in Australia is the mobile and broadband group Optus, and its team, led by the CEO, Kevin Russell, just completed this year's Tour de Cure, riding more than 1,500 kilometers from Adelaide to Canberra.

What makes this charity ride really special is the grass-roots nature of the community involvement along the route. The riders didn't just speed through the towns; on the recent tour, the Tour de Cure team visited schools along the route, spreading the message to kids about making healthy choices early in life. What better way to reach out to the community and learn about its concerns and challenges?

So volunteer! If you are an entrepreneur running a small business or a corporate leader, now is the time to get started, when you're forging ties with the community and building a culture that focuses on how your business impacts the planet. Whether you organize your own event or work on something that's already happening, such efforts will signal to everyone that you are building an company and a commitment for the long term.