

Corporate Social Responsibility

I am heartened by recent manifestations of goodness in the business world, a world weary of hearing negative reports about such things as corporate scandals, fast food franchises contributing to bad health, and exorbitant bonuses for CEOs. No wonder the public is eager to monitor the business ethics of the companies it does business with everyday. No wonder “corporate social responsibility” is the new buzz phrase in the marketplace.

The companies, large and small, that recognize the power of this enlightened approach to business will not only be doing right by their employees, stakeholders, customers, clients and vendors, they will be ensuring their own success in a world weary of supporting companies with bad practices.

Corporate social responsibility *is* good business and makes good PR. A recent survey by Golin/Harris International found that 70% of Americans would *start or increase* the business they do with a company based on its corporate citizenship record. Conversely, *more than half* would *stop doing business* with companies if their corporate citizenship records were poor.

But corporate social responsibility doesn't mean merely providing service excellence (which no longer holds any real meaning now anyway). So, what defines the social responsibility of a business or corporation?

- Strict compliance with laws that govern its industry or trade
- Community support to include volunteerism, partnerships and financial assistance
- Philanthropic and volunteer activities (employees should be involved)
- High-quality products & services that keep their marketed promises
- Environmental awareness practices (even small endeavors such as getting rid of those non-biodegradable Styrofoam cups in the break room.)
- Inclusion and acceptance practices (in terms of race, religion, color, creed, etc.)
- Accountability to stakeholders through proper accounting disclosure

These ideas and others are extolled by Boston College's Center for Corporate Citizenship which defines corporate citizenship as “the business strategy that shapes the values underpinning a company's mission.”

Other good things are happening in the corporate world:

Business Ethics Magazine honors the nation's "100 Best Corporate Citizens" each year. Last year a Boston-based bank won for its work on behalf of social justice issues. Forty per cent of its commercial lending portfolio is committed to progressive community development.

Two new publications are focusing on business ethics: *Worthwhile*, a new magazine with the slogan, "Work with passion, purpose and profit." Coming in September, *Good Magazine* will serve "as a platform for people looking to do good," according to its founder, Ben Goldhirsh, the 26-year-old son of the *Inc. Magazine* founder.

You will no doubt be seeing more good things emerge as corporate social responsibility transforms corporate cultures across the board. Of course no company can take on the injustices of the universe, but business-by-business, we can begin to illuminate our ethical principles and secure our positions as companies that truly care for the communities they serve.