

Go beyond just cutting donation cheques

Contributed by By Gregg McLachlan
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It's a relatively easy thing. Cut a corporate cheque. Make a donation to a favourite organization or cause.

The result is instantly gratifying. You feel like you've made a difference. But here's the marketing rub: is the public noticing? After all, let's face it, doing good is something businesses hope will position their companies as socially responsible citizens.

Now, don't get the wrong idea. Nobody is saying stop writing cheques. Yes, your money does indeed make a big difference for organizations funding much-needed programs. Your money is vital. But today, businesses must look to invest their human capital, in addition to cutting donation cheques.

Why is investing human capital so key? It's because creating a business culture of responsibility is only as strong as your employees. Be honest, your employees likely aren't doing high-fives because your company made a \$1,000 donation. Heck, many times employees have no idea their company is making donations in the first place. They only learn about it when they see the company listed in a 'Thank You' ad in a newspaper or on the web. Or maybe your employees see a photo pinned to a bulletin board showing an exec handing a big cheque to an organization's rep. (By the way, these types of photos rarely capture more than a passing glance nowadays because they are as common as sparrows in a field - if you've seen one, you've seen them all.)

Engaging your employees can create significant bang for your buck. Arguably, far more than just writing a cheque.

Go ahead: Enlist your employees to take the afternoon off work to assist an organization in, let's say, tree planting. Or maybe it will involve painting cabins at a camp for children with cancer. This is what we mean by putting your company's human capital to work. The project may take several days, or be an annual project over a number of years. By committing to the cause with people power, you're integrating sustainable corporate social responsibility (CSR) into your workplace. Odds are that your employees will overwhelmingly embrace the concept. And feel good too, which can never hurt office morale.

Suddenly, your CSR marketing possibilities are endless too. Simple actions in human power can be utilized to spread your message. Television ads. Community service advertisements. Brochures. Corporate videos. Social media use. Websites.

The simple message is this: Today it's difficult to tell a story about your corporate social responsibility based solely on a dollar amount written on a cheque. The best stories involve how you're using your human capital to make a difference. You could easily write a book. But start with one chapter at a time. In the end, you could have a bestseller in your workplace, and in the eyes of current and future customers.

Don't know where to start? Talk to an organization. Most will have no shortage of ideas where your workplace's human capital can be put to good use making a difference.

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