

Article for Best Practice Magazine

Title: Win the war on talent – the business benefits of taking a strategic approach to corporate social responsibility

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A well thought out policy on corporate social responsibility offers many opportunities to both private companies and not-for-profits. Read on to discover the important ways in which corporates can loan their skills to charities, and how to design a partnership that ensures a meaningful experience for both parties.

1 Team building events

Most private sector firms organise staff team building events to gather their employees for knowledge sharing and fun. Charities could offer a 'corporate challenge' - take twenty or thirty people from a private company and have them do something really worthwhile, like decorate a gym for disadvantaged youths, or run a day care centre for older people. Alternatively, they could host a 'The Apprentice' style challenge, splitting the group in two and getting them compete against each other whilst running two divisions or retail outlets for the charity. These types of events offer professionals the chance to learn, communicate and problem solve in a completely new environment and can really broaden their horizons.

It doesn't have to be a one off activity either. Charities could build a series of events that culminates in the corporates contributing to a long-term project. What is more, they usually have budgets for team building, and may be happy to pay for this service.

2 One to one skills lending

Another way for private companies to link in with charities is to take a more individual approach, and extend their workforces' skills and experience at the same time. Employees could volunteer for a certain number of hours per month, and focus on developing new expertise, for example working with the fundraising team, and gain experience doing something entirely different to their full time role. Alternatively they could lend the charity their core professional skills in an area where perhaps they are lacking time and investment, for example Marketing or Retail.

The approach

Corporate social responsibility is a long game - if you are searching for a quick win or a one hit wonder, forget it. Both parties need to commit whole-heartedly to the scheme.

Corporates should remember that charities are running a business too; they have services to deliver, end users to please and targets to achieve. Treat the work with the same respect and diligence you would anything in your own sector. If you go in with a laissez faire attitude, they'll feel they can't rely on you and will only give you 'fringe' activities. You won't get as much out of the experience and they won't get the full benefit of your skill set and competence.

Don't be afraid of being business like with your not-for-profit partner, and clearly state up front exactly what you want from the experience. Put it in writing if you need to. It is far better to be clear and pro-active about what you want to achieve and this clarity will lead to a better partnership in the long run.

With all this help coming their way, not-for-profits cannot afford to sit back on their laurels. They need to ask themselves - what am I going to offer the corporates to make sure they take away something really valuable away from this? These people are doing this for free, so they'll need to ensure a range of new and interesting experiences are available in exchange, as well as the appropriate resource and support. They should offer the corporate staff a fundamental role in their organisation, something they can get their teeth into, where they can make a difference. A partnership has to be a two way street and charities need to match corporates' vigor and professionalism with their own passion and commitment.

Conclusion

Go in to a partnership like this with an open mind. Look for new ways to extend or expand your involvement. Succeed, and you'll see a whole new side to your employees and their capabilities, which is what this is really all about.

A partnership between two different sectors is never easy; passion, drive and dedication are required from both parties. But there is much to be gained. A successful affiliation will give the charity the chance to access new skills and help more people in need, whilst their corporate partners will rediscover a zest for their profession by giving something back.

For more information on forming strategic partnerships contact Nicola Davis on 0845 33111314 or via email at nik@n2-consulting.com

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Box Out

Finding the right partner and setting up the alliance

The five key steps to forming and executing a corporate social responsibility partnership are:

- Step 1

Decide what you *really* want from this experience - don't be shy about admitting the truth. Are your staff jaded and need a new challenge? Your needs or intentions don't necessarily have to be deep and meaningful, but be honest

- Step 2

Find the right partner – read the not-for-profit media, ask employees what they are passionate about, and talk to people with personal experiences of volunteering. You want an organisation with which you feel a natural empathy. Check mutual benefits exist, and design goals together

- Step 3

Develop the opportunities and commit the resources –what are the steps or activities that need to take place to achieve those goals? How many people will be involved and for how long? Also, you'll need a contingency plan, what is the process for spotting and mitigating risks to the planned work?

- Step 4

Executing the event or volunteer programme – making it happen! By this stage both parties should be fully involved and working together, reliable and doing a good job, so this is about executing your plan using the time and resource you have allocated to it

- Step 5

Reviewing the partnership development process – organise frequent review sessions with the key team and volunteers – make sure everything is going to plan, look at what is working and what isn't, and make plans for the next project or initiative based on these successes

Author Biography

Nicola Davis is the managing director of N2 (Squared) Consulting, a management consultancy that helps organisations in the private and third sectors change, improve and grow. Clients include Help the Aged, Retail Assist and Siemens. For more information visit www.n2-consulting.com or e-mail Nicola at nik@n2-consulting.com

