

Minority Business Week

Socially Responsible Businesses Give Back

BY CHARLES B. MACLEAN, PhD

"Doing well by doing good" has become the mantra of socially responsible businesses. Pure altruism has been tempered by the recognition that businesses give-back to the community needs to be targeted and accountable as investing in ones own business. Business giving is being treated as an investment...not just a nice thing to do.

What if you operated your business as if community give-back seeds and accelerates an upward spiral of better employee morale, better productivity, better company reputation, better recruitment and retention, better profits, better community and a better place to do your business?

What if in the long haul, not giving-back to the community that generates your profits...triggers a downward spiral.

To discover how other businesses do their give-back and how you can do it your way...read on.

Why not develop and commit to a "Give-Back Plan" that includes the same components as those in your start-up or existing "Business Plan": measurable outcomes and budget.

Americh Massena & Associates is Portland's quiet investment consulting firm (located in NE Portland) with a heart and a wallet for community give-back. In 1994, early in their business life, Tony Americh and his partner Lisa Massena made a 10-year commitment to support and track the same kids, many on the cusp of trouble. Now they "invest" 6-figures each year in dollars and countless hours.

At Americh Massena better than 99% of the 35 employees volunteer regularly, many as weekly tutors in the schools adopted by the firm. Many tutor in the morning before they come into work. They find that the "feel-good" of com-

munity give-back carries forward on the job. The Grant-Madison Business-to-School partnership has grown from tutoring, to minority scholarships, math clubs, summer science and art camp and more.

The results for the kids...reading and math scores up, reduced drop out...and a deep knowing that someone cares who is constant in their life.

Tips From Tony Americh

1. When interviewing potential employees, ask them about their volunteering experience. (Candidates who go the extra mile in volunteering off the job are more likely to volunteer to go the extra mile on the job.)

2. Hire people who nurture others and themselves. (They are more likely to nurture your customers/clients too.)

3. Make it easy to volunteer before work in the morning. (The "volunteers high" will carry over onto the job and will be talked about over coffee breaks...grinning rather than griping.)

4. Encourage 1:1 mentoring relationships between employees and kids. (Employees who mentor off the job are good candidates to mentor on the job and help bring new employees up to speed more quickly.)

5. Allow "volunteering" to become part of your culture that distinguishes your business from the rest. (It's a bonding thing that becomes even more essential as you grow.) Says Tony Americh, "I can't understand why more businesses don't budget the time and dollars from day one for community give-back. Maybe we can be a blueprint."

Debi Coleman, Chair & CEO of Oregon high-tech company Merix Corporation, said, "I'd draw the map on who benefits from doing business in our state and ask how much do they give back...and to be credible in pointing the finger, I'd look at my own company's



Charles B. Maclean, co-author of "Philanthropy Now: Seeding The New Generation Of Entrepreneurial Givers"

giving first."

Where would your business show up on that map?

So what can you do now? Here are a few possibilities.

Call Business For Social Responsibility at 503.725.5722 to get the inside track on community give-back. Call Junior Achievement at 503.238.6430 to teach kids what makes you successful in business.

Call the Urban League of Portland at 503.280.2600 to help build strong and self-reliant families.

Call self-Enhancement Inc. at 503.249.1721 to make a difference one-on-one, day-after-day in the life of a youth at risk.

Call United Way at 503.226.9306 to focus your give-back to your community of choice.

For information about the research and giving support tools, call 503.297.1490 or e-mail: charles.maclean@trillium-hollow.org

Beginning And Successfully Operating A New Business

CONTINUED FROM PAGE C8

BE CAREFUL HERE, for trying to do everything for everybody when you don't have the resources to produce it, can lead to disaster. It will lead back to poor quality, customers will be upset, and your image in the market place (all things we've previously discussed) will deteriorate. Then it's extremely difficult to build back a good reputation, even if you have corrected your problems. Growth should be contained to no more than 20% to 25% maximum per year. You would be best served to

keep it at 15%.

7. Financial Management: In business, you must understand cash flow, things like debt to equity, and managing to the bank's covenants. Learning what different financial ratios tell you is extremely important. It's then that you can judge your success, tell when to invest in more equipment or people, or when disaster is just around the corner.

8. Park Your Ego and remember that there is always something to learn, that whatever you do can always be done better, and that you can

fail if you don't pay constant attention to everything you are doing. We can easily get inflated ideas about what and how well we are doing things, and if we aren't careful, we can as easily lose everything.

Kirby Fox is the founder and chairman of EXCELL (Executive Leadership Exchange) with three chapters in Portland, two in the Mid Willamette Valley and one in Boise, Idaho. EXCELL is peer-group advisory boards for private sector company presidents and chief decision-makers.

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