

Building better business with generosity

By Stan Craig

The full-page ad in a Sunday edition of The New York Times stated boldly that \$60 million was received in 2012, over \$1 million a week by a variety of recognized charities and community causes. The ad was not from a charity or fundraising organization. It was from one of America's largest retailers with multiple stores all across America. Why run full-page ads announcing charitable giving? Why not a sales ad or holiday offers? Because statistics prove over and over that customers, if given a choice, prefer to buy from those who provide support to charities and causes they see as valuable to their community.

More and more companies understand the balance sheet is more than numbers and have developed values that are stated, respected and carried out. Generosity is one of those values. The buying public has made clear that they prefer to buy from good corporate citizens. Generosity demonstrates a genuine corporate value that benefits the company, employees and the community.

When corporations were first granted their charters to do business in our new democracy, they were evaluated on the contributions they made to the public good. While much has changed in the way companies do business, providing public good is still very important and part of every balance sheet.

Generosity comes in all sizes. It will fit nearly every business. How is true generosity recognized? Generosity is noticed if its goals are visible and more than a sales or a morale booster. If your company is looking for ways to give back, consider the following options:

Money talks

* Money works. In Louisville, Kentucky, the Chairman of the United Way Campaign for 2012, Tom Monahan, wanted to encourage greater participation at all levels of business. But he also had another goal: "to blow away the stereotype of greedy companies interested only in the bottom line." Cash gifts were recognized in a new fashion.

* Partnerships work. Monahan enlisted the help of other community leaders and organizations to create a "Partners in Philanthropy" publication and an awards banquet to showcase funds for the United Way and demonstrate the many examples of community generosity. Both the publication and banquet recognized the corporations and businesses that gave the most in cash contributions to non-profits in the city.

* Gifts in-kind work. Categories were designed to recognize large, medium and small corporations for their cash gifts. Non-profits and the work they do were presented. Small businesses were also recognized for the difference they made in a category called "partners in innovation." A number of family-owned



business leaders were included in this new recognition program. A local design company won for their work in renovating dormitories at a youth treatment center and for enlisting many others for gifts in kind to complete the project.

Volunteers matter

Volunteering works. Businesses that encourage employee volunteer days at a local non-profit of their choice get a double bonus. Employees enjoy serving and local non-profits see your company in a very different light. With employee verification, write a check to an organization representing the value of an employee's work if a paid day-off can't be granted. Schedule an employee generosity day for all employees to sign up for a community or team project.

Helping build a house for Habitat for Humanity, spending a day at a soup kitchen or shelter or helping in a local school or community center are all team building events as well as acts of generosity.

Here are just a few of the dividends that corporate generosity creates according to VolunteerMatch.org.

- * Raises employee morale
94 percent of companies surveyed believed employee volunteering provides a way to raise employee morale
- * Boosts employee health
92 percent of people who volunteer through their workplace report higher rates of physical and emotional health
- * Provides skill development
88 percent of employee volunteers report that volunteering provides networking/career development opportunities
- * Increases employee loyalty
66 percent of employees reported a greater commitment to the company as a result of their experience as volunteers.

There are many more examples of creative ways to be generous. Look around your neighborhood, your community. How can what you do every day become more evident and beneficial to others?

Little things count

"Giving" actually multiplies what you are "receiving." Walk into most Sam's Clubs or Costcos at 1 p.m. on almost any weekday and you can basically have a free lunch--and not by ordering at the lunch counter. Just walk down the aisles

and you will find hot foods from pizza to burgers, cold beverages, hot beverages, sweets and treats of all sorts--freely and gladly handed out. Whole Foods and Trader Joe's are doing the same for their customers.

Why this generosity? The truth is, even if the goal is not necessarily to be generous (as we think of it), generosity can build sales. Coupons for free items, free bonus gifts and prizes have always worked to gain attention and build sales for products from cereal and soap to jewelry and big ticket items such as automobiles and even homes.

Generosity pays dividends:

- * It is attention-getting
- * It is cost efficient
- * It builds top-of-mind awareness
- * It may increase sales
- * Customers or clients perceive a benefit
- * There is a spillover effect to other areas and products

But how can you be generous when your cash is low, your business consists of products or services that you can't give as samples-or you have few employees to volunteer? What then?

- * Offer discounts to charitable organizations
- * Give time or funds to community projects
- * Participate in a community event that is not business-related
- * Offer your place of business for community use, seminars, calling-marathons, a meeting room
- * Lead a class on your specialty for the Chamber of Commerce or any local organization or non-profit
- * Speak to senior citizens clubs, retirement communities, schools, and PTAs and let the group charge participants for your valuable information and keep the revenue

Customers and potential customers will take note. Positive publicity is generated. Commit to generosity in the true sense of the word and it will make a difference that can pay dividends for years to come and build your balance sheet in ways that simply can't be quantified.

Remember, your bottom line may not only be measured by revenue received, but by resources shared. Generosity is a business vitamin that will build a healthier bottom line.

Stan Craig, the founder of the ForeTalk Seminar, is an accomplished financial planner, executive coach and keynote speaker. He is also author of "ForeTalk: Taking Care of Tomorrow Today." As a finance professional, Stan enjoyed a 27-year career at Merrill Lynch, which included positions as National Sales Manager, Director of Global Sales for Defined Asset Funds and the First Vice President and Senior Director of the Office of Investment Performance. For more information on Stan, please visit www.ForeTalkSeminar.com.

EEOC seeks public input to develop quality control plan



The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission recently announced that it is inviting public input into a Quality Control Plan under development as part of its Strategic Plan.

In February 2012, the EEOC approved the Strategic Plan for fiscal years 2012-2016. The Strategic Plan establishes a framework for achieving the EEOC's mission to stop and remedy unlawful employment discrimination by focusing on strategic law enforcement, education and outreach, and efficiently serving the public. The second performance measure of the plan requires the EEOC to approve a Quality Control Plan. The QCP will revise criteria to measure the quality of agency investigations and conciliations throughout the nation.

The agency encourages participation from individuals, employers, advocacy groups, agency stakeholders and other interested parties. While no specific format is required, we are most interested in recommendations for quality indicia of investigations or conciliations or general recommendations for improving the quality of our intake process, investigations and conciliations. Please also include a contact e-mail and/or mailing address.

Suggestions must be submitted by 5 p.m. EDT on Friday, March 1 to strategic.plan@eeoc.gov or received by mail at Executive Officer, Office of the Executive Secretariat, U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 131 M Street, NE, Washington, DC 20507.

All submissions will be reviewed for possible inclusion in a future EEOC Commission meeting in Washington, D.C. on the development of the QCP. If selected, the author or a representative would be invited to testify before the Commission in person, via telephone, or via video conferencing.

All submissions will be made available to members of the Commission and to EEOC staff. In addition, your submissions may be disclosed to the public. By providing input in response to this solicitation you are consenting to its use and consideration by the EEOC and to public dissemination. Accordingly, do not include any information in submitted materials that you would not want made public such as a home address, telephone number, etc. Also, note that when input is submitted by e-mail, the sender's e-mail address automatically appears on the message.