

Corporate Social Responsibility: Complex concept, simple strategy

*Sondra Lintelmann-Dellaripa
Principal, Harvest Development Group*



These are probably **the best four statements** I know of in approaching corporate philanthropy for the nonprofit sector.

1. You can't talk with your donor unless you speak their language
2. You can't solicit your donor unless you know their need
3. You can't earn a partner unless you earn their trust
4. And you can't earn their trust without respecting their vision.

If you read no further, that's ok, because everything you need to know about corporate philanthropy is wrapped up in those four statements.

Companies now define their giving in the term Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Although the theories and models of CSR have evolved over time, the core of the effort remains: The company is doing business in a way that is good for society. A broad but defining vision by design, it is one which can be applied to a global stage as well as a local community.

A decade ago, CSR was a trendy idea, a theory in shifting corporate philanthropy, embraced by the fringe in both the for-profit and nonprofit world. It was fighting for a place in the board room,

groundbreaking conference at the Boston College Center for Corporate Citizenship, technicians from the worlds leading industries—Coca Cola to Microsoft—shared stories of innovative CSR designs, scrutinized data of CSR efficiency and effectiveness, and aired collective frustration over deaf ears in the inner circle of their corporations.

Just ten years later, and CSR has not only taken the chairmen's seat at the board table, it has been refined and defined in a variety of ways. **CSR now drives many companies corporate philanthropy in a strategic fashion and at a minimum colors a company's corporate giving decisions.** It has become an industry unto itself, with a myriad of sub-network ideas, efforts

but preaching its campaign in the cubicles. Its concept was not new. The earliest use of the term Corporate Social Responsibility can be traced back to the early 1950's. Its evolution through forty decades was not remarkable, nor was it quick to catch on. In 2001, at a

and goals. It takes a specialist to clarify it all and even then there are diverse perceptions and beliefs.

SO WHAT'S A SMALL NONPROFIT IN CONNECTICUT TO DO?

First and foremost, seek to understand, but don't let yourself be overwhelmed. The goal is not to become the ultimate authority on CSR. Learn the core concepts, the leading visionary efforts and the outcomes most valued. This is true not only for the person responsible for corporate giving in your organization, but also for your executive leadership and for your board.

Study the language. Time spent in learning the language of CSR- terms, definitions, expressions and idioms- will pay off as you build a common vision with your corporate partners. Your goal is not to show off your knowledge of the language but to understand the conversation and their needs.

Research the ambition and purpose of your corporate partners CSR vision. Each corporate donor is unique- treat them as such. We traditionally lump our corporate donors in one pool, using the same two or three approaches. Apply the same donor research standards and practices to your corporate donors that you do with your

individual donors. This will establish a basis for determining the best partnership your organization can have with the right company. Having this data will lead to a diversified corporate giving strategy for your organization that will help to raise more corporate dollars.

Abandon cynical thinking. I am disappointed at how many nonprofits I have counseled to shift their perception of how and why a company is embracing corporate social responsibility. Not all companies are self serving. Not all companies need marketing exposure. And not all companies will fund you because you're the biggest and most influential on the block. Come to appreciate this, and enhance your partnerships through mutual understanding and respect.

And finally, develop a personal relationship with the people in your partner companies. This should not need to be stated, but like our past practice of lumping all companies into one approach, we have missed the boat. How many of us can honestly say we could call up the president of most of our corporate partners and they would take the call? That's the level of companionship required in successful corporate giving

today. And if your organization is helping the company meet their CSR vision, that's the level that will result.

Building your response to Corporate Social Responsibility for your organization is an essential component of your development plan now that CSR has evolved. Make sure you are giving the attention to corporate giving, and are spending the time and resources that are required, for effective results. ■

Although the theories and models of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) have evolved over time, the core of the effort remains:

The company is doing business in a way that is good for society.

Sondra Lintelmann-Dellaripa is principal consultant at Harvest Development Group. A 16 year veteran of the philanthropy industry, Sondra specializes in assessment, strategic planning, board relations, and executive coaching. Her professional experience includes VP of the ECHN Foundation, Director of Corporate and Foundation Relations at CT Children's Medical Center, as well as Director of Development for the Governor's Prevention Partnership.

Sondra is also presenting a workshop for Connecticut Association of Nonprofits. CORPORATE PHILANTHROPY AND NONPROFITS: KEY ISSUES & BUILDING YOUR PROGRAM will be held on April 4 and April 11 from 9 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. at CT Nonprofits in Hartford. This workshop will highlight environmental pressures affecting both the nonprofit and the business perspective on corporate philanthropy; shifts in corporate philanthropic engagement; and opportunities for partnership. Attendees will receive tools and resources to use in building their own programs and will work interactively in small groups to test their knowledge and practice what they have learned using real life scenarios. For more information and to register, visit www.ctnonprofits.org/education/offersings.

I need nonprofit experts that make a difference.



These days, you're working harder and longer to make a positive change. We believe we can help. At Kostin, Ruffkess & Company, our Not-for-Profit Group can support your mission, strategic goals and long-term financial strength. Whether you need to enhance corporate governance, improve reporting procedures, adopt sound investment policies, or develop a strategic plan, we are there for you. To better tell your nonprofit's story, call Patricia McGowan, CPA, Member of the Firm and Not-for-Profit Group Leader, at 860.678.6007.



FARMINGTON & NEW LONDON, CT • SPRINGFIELD, MA

Certified Public Accountants and Business Advisors