

Session B: People

Operational Corporate Social Responsibility

Open Space Interactive Session Summary
Thursday, November 5, 2009 – 11:15 - 12:45pm

Moderator

- >> **Barb Steele**, Director of Membership, Canadian Business for Social Responsibility

Speakers

- >> **Neil Crawford**, Principal and Leader of the Best Employers in Canada Study, Hewitt Associates
- >> **David Labistour**, CEO, Mountain Equipment Co-op
- >> **Willa Black**, Vice-President of Corporate Affairs, Cisco Systems Canada Co.

Key Messages

- >> Perceptions of CSR performance and organizational leadership are interconnected.
- >> If a company wants to improve employee engagement, they must first begin addressing leadership engagement before considering CSR models.
- >> There is a large gap between what Canadians “say” and “do”; in particular regarding the Millennial generation.
- >> Social media can be a great CSR leveraging tool, as it allows organizations to communicate widely and cost-effectively.

Worth Repeating

“Employ for passion, train for skills.”

- David Labistour, CEO, Mountain Equipment Co-op

“Engaged employees say, stay, and thrive.”

- Neil Crawford, Principal and Leader of the Best Employers in Canada Study, Hewitt Associates

Summary

This session addressed the importance of CSR to increasing stakeholder engagement, productivity and brand relevance. Many companies are hesitant to invest in CSR programs; however, as these speakers asserted, there is great internal and external potential for return on CSR investment. Neil Crawford noted that leading organizations are beginning to see the positive relationship between CSR and brand reputation. Companies like Mountain Equipment Co-op show that increasing engagement sets the tone for the organization, and also increases their desirability as an employer.

Transformational Corporate Social Responsibility

The majority of employees entering the workforce today are Millennials (born 1981 and onwards). This group prioritizes work that is meaningful over practical or economic considerations. As CSR research conducted by Hewitt Associates and CBSR for the 2010 Best Employers in Canada Study confirms, organizations must understand that although Millennials' current Personal Social Responsibility level may be low, this generation expects a high level of CSR commitment and engagement.

The Best Employers study also reveals that to improve employee engagement, CSR alone should not be seen as the starting point. Leaders must lay the groundwork, by changing the way they talk and interact with their employees. This includes initiating and developing bonds between the employee and the company – this will harness a two-way dialogue, and in turn engage the employee to respect and participate in CSR programs.

At Mountain Equipment Co-op, employee engagement mirrors the vision and values of their CSR landscape. MEC hires for passion and the ability of the employee to integrate into their culture, and then trains for practical skills. Programs initiated through MEC, like “Dumps for Diving”, encourage employees to learn from the program and have fun at the same time, which increases their level of Personal Social Responsibility.

The CSR team at Cisco was tasked with developing a national CSR strategy that brought people together and inspired them to act. To leverage engagement, the CSR team first went to the employees to determine what they thought would be a good focus for the program. The resounding response from employees was around environmental awareness and commitment, and so the *One Million Acts of Green* program was born.

One Million Acts of Green not only saved over 1 million kilograms of greenhouse gas emissions, but also brought in significant revenue and visibility for Cisco. Willa Black and her team were able to communicate the program's results through their social media program, in a cost effective way that had a positive impact.

By utilizing social media, engaging employees and establishing extensive partnerships, *One Million Acts of Green* was communicated widely to individuals, schools and businesses. Social media and marketing was an “exemplary and effective tool in developing the conversation around the program”. Using Facebook, Twitter and other social media sites created a buzz online that evoked the development and growth of partnerships and program participation. Further, having Cisco employees involved with the program from the outset provided many program champions from the beginning. Taking the time to establish proper groundwork provided the foundation of success for this program.

These discussions, information and case studies were a valuable resource for Summit attendees, as it gave them tools and examples to consider when implementing CSR in their own organizations or in engaging with key stakeholders. It also helped in highlighting the relevance and interconnectedness of CSR to the benefit of not only the environment, but the company as well.