Attracting Talent Through Corporate Social Responsibility: 3 Myths Debunked

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become as much a part of the hiring process as offering great benefits and competitive salaries. Today's new wave of recruits prioritizes social responsibility in their own lives and are determined to join organizations that care about their well-being, as well as that of the community.

Consider successful organizations such as Apple, Boeing, Google, Facebook and Zappos, which are known for offering endless perks. They promise work-life balance and provide corporate-sponsored initiatives to contribute to the betterment of the world around them. Are these organizations that expend such energy and effort attracting talent through corporate social responsibility really holding up their end of the bargain? Does it really lead to a better life for their employees and society as a whole?

As the idea of weaving CSR into the fabric of corporate culture becomes part of standard operating procedure for businesses in the United States and abroad, it's increasingly critical to dispel outmoded notions about what "being socially responsible" really means. Organizations need to work on building a stronger CSR program that impacts the community every day and encourages employee engagement.

Here are some of the most common myths surrounding this movement and some tips for implementing CSR in a positive, proactive way.

Myth 1
CSR is Reserved for Behemoth Corporations Only

When considering organizations that promote their CSR in recruitment efforts, mammoths like Target, with $875 million donated to charitable causes since 2010, and Google, with data centers that use 50 percent less energy than the typical business, come to mind first. But there's no reason that these ideas and initiatives can't be implemented on a smaller scale. Your organization may not be capable of offering nearly a billion dollars' worth of charitable donations, but that doesn't mean you can't impact your community in similar ways.

Whether you're starting green initiatives that reduce waste, making it a priority to conserve energy or interfacing with local groups to help your community, your CSR efforts are no less important than what Google has done to reduce its carbon footprint. Highlighting tangible avenues for your employees to get involved and giving prospective hires direct evidence of the influence of your organization can show that your business delivers on its promises.
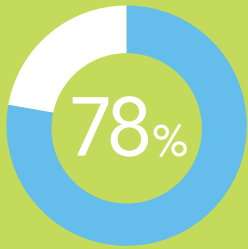
Myth 2
Corporate Philanthropy = CSR

Although it's impressive that Target could donate such a large sum of money to charity over such a short period, this type of donation isn't really what CSR programs should be designed to accomplish. CSR programs are as much about engaging your employees as they are about impacting your community. Learning that your organization donates considerable money to charity, although inspiring, doesn't necessarily make employees feel included in the process.

CSR needs to be regarded as a big part of the corporate culture and values. Accomplishments and future project ideas should be featured heavily on your website and promoted in job advertisements. Various marketing efforts should be set up to reflect this CSR strategy and promote the overall importance of the initiatives.

This ideology can't merely be a smoke screen to get consumers and talent in the building; it should be cemented into the very foundation of your organization.

Myth 3
Employees Care About Benefits, not CSR

According to Crain's *Chicago Business*, seven in 10 young adults consider themselves social activists,[1] a staggering statistic that's nearly double that of 2010. Gone are the days when an extra week of vacation or a liberal work-from-home policy would stand alone to entice prospective employees. There will always be a need to offer competitive benefits and salaries, but increasingly it's the intangible corporate values that inspire prospective hires.

Millennials want to be heard and want their employer to mirror their own ideals. According to a survey by Cone Communications, 78 percent of Millennials indicated that CSR directly influences whether they would work at an organization.[2] These young employees will eventually be the leadership of your organization, and you'll want to secure their loyalty by hearing and supporting their interests.

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Publicize and Prioritize for Maximum Recruitment Success

Although institutionally embracing CSR is a vital tool to captivate and engage prospective employees, equally important is ensuring your message is delivered loud and clear. There are three key tactics you can use to showcase CSR throughout your organization:

1 Advertise from within. It's not enough to simply have a comprehensive CSR program. Your talent needs to know about it. Your website's career page is the perfect avenue for cross promotion. Job seekers should find details about initiatives, articles about the impact of your CSR program, and first-hand accounts from current employees touting your CSR prowess right on your job page.

2 It starts with your recruiters. Those responsible for selling your brand to talent must understand the importance of CSR as a recruitment tool and be ready to send that message to candidates. Recruitment specialists should be constantly looped in to adaptations, advancements and achievements so they're prepared to answer any and all questions that come their way.

3 Meld your CSR to your brand. Your CSR program needs to be touted not as an addendum to your overall corporate culture, but as an integral component of your organization. This will serve to both attract talent now and enhance impressions of your brand going forward.

Attracting top talent will always be one of the most crucial elements of a successful business. By integrating social responsibility into the very framework of your organization, you'll be positioned to stay well ahead of the recruitment and retention curve. ■

[1] *Corporate Social Responsibility is Millennials' New Religion*, Andrew Swinand, Crain's Communication Inc., 2014.
[2] *Perceptions, Millennials and CSR: How to Engage the New Leaders of Tomorrow*, Cone Communications, Inc., 2013.