



5 Ways Your Company Can Be More Socially Responsible

OCTOBER 16, 2014 BY SACHIN SHENOLIKAR

SHARE →

The digitized modern life has given us examples of progress in practically every field. But at what cost? What is the toll on the planet, its inhabitants, and its natural resources? Is there a dark side, and if so, how pressing of an issue is it?

According to [World Wildlife Fund](#), it is this pressing: By the year 2030, “humanity will need the capacity of two Earths to absorb CO₂ waste and keep up with natural resource consumption.”

That stark forecast explains a rising sense of urgency among governments, businesses and individuals “to secure the future in all its complexity for generations to come,” the WWF wrote in its 2010 Living Planet Report.

For businesses, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) — a broad term that covers a wide range of important measures of corporate behavior and performance — is central to the solution.

CSR standards include “green” initiatives such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions, conserving energy, encouraging public transportation, and reducing waste. But it also covers other important activities, such as philanthropy and diversity and inclusion.

These are not new areas of focus, but corporations are trying different strategies in implementing new ideas. For instance, rather than separating individual issues into departments that work autonomously, companies now [integrate social responsibility](#) across their operations, says Diane O’Connor, Vice President of Global Environment, Health, Safety and Sustainability at Xerox.



Diane O'Connor

Building CSR into the fabric of an organization puts the focus on long-term continuous improvements, rather than short-term project completion. Along the way, companies have learned that this preserves Mother Earth and boosts the bottom line.

“Over the past ten years, corporate social responsibility has truly come of age,” says [Susan McPherson](#), a sustainability consultant.

Real Business asked McPherson, O'Connor, and other experts for advice on developing a CSR strategy that works.

1. Give CSR a Voice. Think long and hard about what your company's main objectives are and how they tie into CSR. “The first thing a company needs to do is identify its unique contribution to society,” says Elaine Cohen, the founder of [Beyond Business](#).

The next step is getting your message out in a clear way so employees, customers, and the general public will all be on board. “If operating sustainably and contributing to the community is an authentic part of your brand, it should also be a part of the story that your brand tells,” says McPherson.



Susan McPherson

Examples of holistic engagement include skills-based volunteering, better daily habits to reduce waste generation, and more involvement from executives in long-term sustainability decisions.

2. Be Thorough With Metrics. It can be tricky to measure some corporate social responsibility actions, but it is crucial to show your work when possible. “Measurement is key so that you can assess the progress you’ve made against the goals you set,” says McPherson.

O’Connor recommends that you measure the results of sustainability projects with quality-improvement tools, such as Lean Six Sigma, a continuous improvement methodology. Lean Six Sigma is now a fundamental aspect of how Xerox does business, with the intent of making the LSS philosophy part of everyday responsibilities.

“We know that what gets measured gets done,” adds O’Connor. “More importantly, a quantitative approach allows us to prioritize our resources and efforts. It is also a means for us to validate our success and the environmental sustainability claims.”

3. Make CSR a Part of Everything. Get involved in initiatives that are important to both your employees and customers. That covers everything from charitable giving to environmental programs to ethical business practices.

Then, it’s a matter of infusing these initiatives into the company’s overall mindset. Making CSR part of the company’s DNA is preferable to “creating special CSR projects that are progressed

by a few and do not reach the core business,” says Cohen.



Elaine Cohen

“Companies that dabble in one part of the program but do not address employee engagement in other parts of the CSR approach may not reap the full benefits,” she adds.

4. You Don’t Need to Be Rich. Corporate budgets are tight, but there are other ways to contribute if funding isn’t available.

“If [your company] can’t write a huge check to a local nonprofit, collaborate with your employees and volunteer your company’s skills instead,” says McPherson. “If you can’t afford to invest in a renewable energy system, make sure you’re turning lights off and opening the windows instead of using AC when possible.”

“From an environmental standpoint, every effort, no matter how small, when repeated hundreds of times, can help,” says O’Connor.