

## Allowing your business to help charity helps you too

At one point you could not move through the business world without tripping over well-intentioned CSR policies. Corporate Social Responsibility: a concept which described the principles of moral behaviour shared across an organisation and incorporated into vision statements.

As with early examples of equal opportunities policies, CSR statements were beautifully written documents, printed to a high specification and left to gather dust on a shelf until evidence of commitment was required.

We can all point to many fine, high profile examples of corporate philanthropy, but it is not an uncommon challenge to attempt to separate the altruistic wheat from the posturing chaff.

Donating to charities is a simple way for a company to enhance its reputation and put a monetary value on CSR.

Logos proliferate and brands become prominent. Often charities are ranked in a way which reflects their ability to attract target consumers. The chosen charity gains money and profile and the company benefits from its association with a good cause.

Through sponsored award schemes, businesses can create an instant legacy of expertise associated with activities of achievement.

They can become paragons of the CSR world simply by making a large donation. While writing huge cheques suits some, others adopt a stakeholder engagement model.

Individuals, groups, communities and neighbours affected by a business feel included and empowered if their views are considered.

The challenges for the executive are to define which groups count as stakeholders and to find the resources to manage an increasingly complex and hierarchical structure.

More and more, CSR commitments are approached in the spirit of altruism. Corporations are finding that more intrinsic value can be added in this 21st century economic climate by pointing talent and expertise directly at the heart of the community.

Charities and not-for-profit groups are benefitting from business professionals leaping from their comfort zones and sharing skills across other sectors. Many middle and senior managers sit on school governing bodies. Individual accountants and lawyers have broadened the definition of pro-bono and act as advisors to or trustees of charity boards.

As chairman of St Ann's Hospice, I see at close quarters how professional people can be on a board of trustees. An effectively constituted board offers a depth of expertise, crucial to the specific needs of the charity.

Trustees accept ultimate responsibility for directing the affairs of a charity, ensuring that it is solvent, well-run, and delivering the required outcomes.

While there are often well-meaning, thoughtful volunteers, ready to give up their time for a good cause, the recruitment of trustees is a challenging process.

St Ann's Hospice is blessed with trustees who, for many years, have offered their services freely and care about the hospice deeply.

All from professional backgrounds, some have retired from their primary roles and others work around their professional lives.

The high level of governance cannot be achieved without specific expertise in organisational management, accountancy, law and in the case of St Ann's Hospice, which operates 15 shops through its trading company, a deep understanding of current and predictive trends in the retail sector.

Another benefit which emerges from experts showing an interest in becoming charity trustees is that it contributes to effective succession planning.

As with any business development plan, regardless of loyalty, dedication or time-served, good governance requires refreshing terms of office on a cyclical basis.

An affiliative management style which reaches beyond the immediate environment allows business leaders to offer professional development in a creatively tangential manner.

Participative managers improve individual performance, which is a well documented route to raising the business profile and profitability.

Collaboration is key to serving communities. Charities, good causes and not-for profit organisations reap great rewards and by allowing your key staff to volunteer their talents, everyone wins. You are offering the flexibility to act; the responsibility to make decisions; helping them develop clarity in communication and a commitment to team action.

From a business perspective, those are gifts which keep on giving.

For more information on the Board of Trustees at St Ann's Hospice, visit [www.sah.org.uk](http://www.sah.org.uk)