

Good morning, everybody. Dennis Engelbrecht with The Family Business Institute, Digging Deeper.

Today, I want to talk about community development in your business. Recently, in a couple of strategic planning sessions, we came upon, I guess you'd say, a couple of companies who did a fair amount of community involvement, but they didn't seem to be capturing the benefit from them. Their organizations didn't have the pride that usually comes from that community development. So, we started to think about asking why that is and how can you get the most out of your community development program? If you're like most contractors, you're probably very generous and love sharing success, and probably have genuine care for a lot of things in your community, the community itself, the industry, and certain charities and such also. But are you getting the most out of your company's involvement in those things? And I think probably most people don't.

So, in addressing this with a couple of companies that we're going through planning with, we tried to lay out a couple areas to help you get the most out of your community development. So, consider these.

First of all, what we find in a lot of organizations is there really is no champion or anybody in charge of the community development. A lot of times it's very responsive. Things come in, employees might come in with an idea, and it gets tossed around the table between the owners or the leadership group, who say, "Oh yeah, we'll support that. We'll sponsor that. We'll do that billboard. Yeah. We'll do a collection for that." That sort of thing. But having a champion, either just from the rank and file, it doesn't have to be a leader, but somebody who's really passionate about it and can organize those things, that can really be helpful. And it may be one of the leaders, one of the ownership group that takes that on and really is in charge of it and in charge of getting the most out of it. But I think that's the first step, is somebody's got to care about it and it's got to be somebody's job. If it's not, it just flows in and out and will tend to be erratic.

Couple of great ideas that I've seen along the way, very recently with a company that provides service days, provides a couple of service days a year. So, any employee in the organization can take an additional day off to go do Meals on Wheels or do a Habitat for Humanity thing, those types of things. And it's very interesting: by allowing your employees to take that time, not only do they come back to work more refreshed and probably more prideful, but they connect the company and the community, and that really does a special thing, I think, with the culture of the company and the way people feel about their employer and their employment. So, getting your people involved is very, very important, and getting involved on a personal basis, not just with money.

The other thing I've seen done very well by some companies is highlighting the involvement and the successes from those involvements. Sometimes it's just photo. You might have, in the newsletter, the photo of the team that went out and built the Habitat house or went out and helped one of your employees do a new foundation on their garage. I've seen somebody even do an annual report, and probably the biggest thing in that annual report was the team members, again, being together, working in the community on various involvements and things like that. But by highlighting those successes, it really helps build pride in the organization and the things that the organization is doing.

Again, just recently, I've gone to a couple of companies where they're donating a lot. They're giving a lot of money, but there's no connection, and in a lot of cases, the employees don't even know what the company's involved in, so they're not getting the full advantage of that pride aspect, I think, that helps build the culture. So, highlight that.

And by the way, don't just highlight the things the company is doing. Find things that your employees are doing on their own. You'll probably find, if you did a question around one of your meetings or something, "What things are you involved in your community?" and you find people that are involved in their church, they're involved in their community, they're doing Meals for Wheels or whatever. They're donating here and they're donating there. So, find those things that your people in the company are doing as individuals as well and highlight those. And again, that just tends to build up that teamwork pride and have a better feeling about the people you're working with and among.

And then again, I want to re-emphasize this, but any time you can get involved in something where a team of people are actually going to do it. I was at a bar last night at a member's wedding, and 80 people in red shirts came in and just did a little togetherness thing around a charity. And I think when your people get together and do something like that, if it's a fun run, or again, building a Habitat house or something like that, those things where your team gets together and does something for somebody else, they just have a greater meaning sometimes than your business success.

Another thing to think about is helping your own. Some companies create funds and actually then looking for opportunities. So, it may be one of your team members' family members is sick and suffering from cancer or something, or the wind blew down their barn, so you go rebuild their barn. But if you keep your tentacles out for things that are happening among your community of employees and their families and their communities, I think you'd find opportunities also to help your own, and those really get a connection and can create something special when you help your own folks. And whether you do a special fund around that or something, it's not necessarily important, it's just most important to look for those opportunities and try to build on those.

And then finally, you can get your business hat back on and think about, "Okay, is my community involvement strategic?" And there's nothing wrong with it being strategic. There's nothing wrong with it having a business benefit. So, if your people are involved in Rotary, which does good, or a Lions Club, which does good, or whatever, that's got a lot of benefits. First of all, oftentimes you're in the right place to meet and know the influencers in town, so when they're sending business some way, they send it to you. So, there is a return for that.

The other thing that happens when your people are involved in those is, they develop as leaders by being among the community leaders and being in those places in the community. So, there's a dual benefit there. So not necessarily directly related to the giving and doing good, but still, part of your community development is getting your folks out and involved in the community and involved in those organizations and they'll feel better about themselves. And again, it'll reflect well on your company, and certainly your company will benefit from those relationships and the good feelings people have about your company as well.

So in summary, if you haven't looked at your community development program in a while, there probably are a lot of ways that that can help your culture, help your community involvement, give back, all of which are important. So again, thanks a lot. Dennis Engelbrecht, Digging Deeper.