

Making an Impact

How to Be a Force in Your Community

What type of relationship do you have with your community? You run a business, so you probably support area sports teams and town initiatives and participate in local groups. I would guess that your company is also considered a valued corporate neighbor by members of your community.

Most business owners realize that getting involved in their communities will elevate their public image and strengthen their brand awareness. A contribution to your community can take the form of donations, social responsibility and charitable causes. As a whole, these initiatives are all community relations. I would contend that community relations is an important focus for any business, but it is crucial for local and independently owned businesses.

In most businesses, community relations is an exercise in public relations since it speaks to the business's public image. The core of community relations is about goodwill and giving back.

The one major exception to consider that makes community relations different from donations, social responsibility and charitable causes is the level of engagement with and from your community. It should be a mutually reciprocal relationship.

Take a look at how your business interacts with the community. It can be as easy as a survey asking general questions to your customers, employees and neighbors, and then trying to see your business through their eyes.



Is your community relations plan deliberate, and does it reflect the company's overall strategy? Do you have an actionable ongoing plan specifically for community relations, and does it reflect your company's mission and values?

If not, you should. Businesses that are a positive force in their communities:

- Have the trust and confidence of their neighbors.
- Improve their local areas.
- Attract and retain the best talent.
- Are seen as community ambassadors.

To be a force in your community, community relations can no longer be an add-on activity. It is an ongoing function that should be part of your core business strategy. If treated with the same planning respect as other areas, community relations is a purposeful way to build a long-term relationship with your neighbors. Inevitably, being involved in your community contributes to the bottom line.

Are you being a force in your community? If not, what can you do to become one? Your neighbors and community depend on you just as much as you depend on them to shop your operation. ●

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