

It's Time to Place Social Purpose At The Center of Your Business

Growing up during the 60s in the San Francisco Bay Area – the epicenter of many social justice movements – with parents who were both news media pioneers, I learned early on the importance of communications within larger societal issues and social justice movements. As a result of this cultivated passion, I started my own PR agency in San Francisco. Throughout my 35+ years of experience, a core value of mine has been social purpose.

Having social purpose means being motivated for one's work to have an impact beyond profitability—for it to transform people and communities, and to inspire positive change. Social purpose can be related to education, economic opportunity, equity, equality, or the environment, but whatever form it takes, social purpose means doing more than just delivering services to your clients.

For our agency, having a social purpose means ensuring that we provide an opportunity for diverse communities to be heard, and contribute to solving issues that have impact locally and nationally. It might be different for your company, but this fact remains the same: building social purpose into a business' core values will not only help its bottom line, but also define the company's very soul.

And the idea of social purpose doesn't just apply to corporations. Public agencies are also looking at their social purpose beyond what they are entrusted. An example is one of our clients, a large public utilities organization. We worked to help it become the first in the nation to adopt a community benefit policy.

Because of these policies, the utility works hard to be a "good neighbor" through nine programs that encompass neighborhood revitalization, workforce development, and education. It works closely with communities while helping to ensure the well-being of the people around its facilities, emphasizing its role as an environmental steward in areas it serves.

This philosophy of going above and beyond one's "mandate" is still fairly unique amongst the public sector—corporations, by and large, invest much more in these areas. Nevertheless, it's starting to catch on, on both organizational and individual levels.

As a result, as more people begin to evaluate their connection to the work that they do, social purpose becomes an integral part of deciding who to work for. Many are now asking themselves: *Does this company embody my values and have a positive social impact?* To attract the best candidates and create a culture of talented thought-leaders, businesses must offer something beyond a paycheck: the opportunity to change lives and enrich communities.

How can you ensure that your company prioritizes social purpose? It needs to start from the top: the CEO should embody and emphasize the company's core values. Once this is in place, your staff should mobilize behind social purpose initiatives that align with these values.

Social purpose is a core principle of my agency. While we keep growing in this area, our clientele is increasingly reflective of these values, and we seek clients that share this vision. It makes doing our daily work worthwhile. After all, so much of your life is spent at work and employees want to feel a sense of purpose and contribution to the world around us. Allow them—and yourself—that opportunity.