

From Roo to You



September, 2010

Focused Philanthropy: Do Good, Feel Good, Make Good

Did you know that “giving” provides a sort of “adrenalin rush”? Sometimes I forget that when I am running from one thing to the next and wondering how on earth I will find time to meet professional and personal demands and still “give back.” But every time I mentor a client, conduct a site visit to a non-profit or greet one of my Girl Scouts who can’t wait for the next big event, I feel that “rush”, and remember why it is worth all the time, energy and financial commitment. In fact, scientific studies show that volunteering reduces the incidence of depression and heart problems, eases pain and improves the immune system. You can view the full report on *The Health Benefits of Volunteering: A Review of Recent Research* by [clicking here](#).

This is the time of year when organizations are budgeting, United Way drives are beginning and we start to see signs for “Coats for Kids” and other worthy causes. 2010 was a tough year for many non-profits, for businesses and for families. So how do we prioritize when and where to give our gifts of time and money? This month’s issue is dedicated to helping you, and your organizations, identify the causes you want to support with your gifts.

My hope is for each of you is to find a way to “Do Good, Feel Good, Make Good” in 2011 that is right for you.

I usually avoid “commercials” in my newsletter, but given this month’s topic I am boldly and proudly promoting a couple of charitable organizations I am involved with, and would love to connect with any of you interested in learning more about them.

The first is the Paige Department of the WCA Foundation. WCA, founded by 20 women in 1866, was the first benevolent organization in Minnesota. The Paige Department has the ability to donate to virtually any cause that meets a human service need in the local community. Our next grant application deadline is fast approaching November 1st. If you know of a worthy organization in the Twin Cities, encourage them to apply to one of the WCA’s three Departments (Pillsbury and Dunwoody Departments are restricted to organizations benefits women and girls).

The second is the Women of Influence Giving Circle: www.womenofinfluenceinc.org. We are a group of professional women who pool our charitable giving dollars to causes we select

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that promote entrepreneurialism, safety/security and economic justice for women and girls in Minnesota. We are in the midst of site visits to eight amazing organizations this month. This year our goal is to issue \$25,000 in grants and we could use your help. Please join us at our meeting on **Thursday evening, November 6th** if you are interested in meeting a great group of women and learning about the work of some tremendous non-profits in the Twin Cities. During this meeting we will be reviewing the site visit reports and selecting our grantees for 2010. Please let me know if you can join us, or if I can provide you with information about our group offline.

For You: Your Personal Giving Plan

It seems that every other call you receive during the evening is from a professional fund raising firm soliciting donations for their cause. While many are worthy organizations, we each have limited time and financial resources. Here are some questions to help you figure out your giving plan:

1. **Do you want to impact locally, regionally or globally?** Last year, on behalf of my daughters, my parents donated to a non-profit that supports agriculture and economic self-sufficiency in developing countries. The girls received recognition for doing their part in purchasing a portion of a goat and a cow. This is the most interesting gift I think they have received, and much more meaningful than a Target gift card. At the same time, wouldn't it be great if this year my daughters chose which charity to invest in? Your local city office should be able to direct you to local rotary, Lions Clubs, and other organizations that are doing good right in your own back yard.
2. **Do you want to use your professional expertise?** Some people use their professional expertise to help others, such as attorneys who donate time to advising non-profits, or SCORE counselors who provide business advice to small business. A former coworker of mine was passionate about travel and he dedicated time each year to an organization called "Engineers Without Borders". Each year he would travel with other engineers to disadvantaged countries and complete engineering projects such as improving water supply and improving sanitation.
3. **Do you have a particular passion for issues related to children, seniors or some other particular group?** If you have a passion, there is likely a charity trying to impact it.

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4. **Which particular social issue(s) keep you up at night?** Is it health, poverty, safety, global citizenship or some other sort of advocacy? When you read the news about a certain issue do you find yourself saying, “if someone would only.....” This might be your cause.
5. **Is there a personal or family history that inclines you to support a given cause?** Whether it is successfully rising from poverty, surviving abuse, fighting cancer, or immigrating to a new place, you have a story to tell, and people who can benefit from your guidance and example.

If you aren't sure where to begin, or where to commit your time and dollars, here are some organizations that can help you decide:

United Way. www.unitedway.org. If your company supports the United Way you may be able to make pre-tax contributions through payroll deductions. These donations support a variety of non-profits in your local area. You can even direct these dollars toward specific causes or organizations.

Charities Review Council. www.smartgivers.org This is a Minnesota-based organization that helps you identify charities that fit your interests, and educates you in accountability standards for non-profits.

Women's Foundation of Minnesota: <http://www.wfmn.org/> Among its many other great functions, WFMN offers a seminar on *Creating Your Personal Giving Plan* that has earned nothing but rave reviews.

For Your Organization: Aligning Giving with Organizational Goals and Culture

Giving back is sometimes thought of as a “nice thing to do” or a good PR move. During profitable years it is easier to give money and earn a tax write off at the same time. During lean years, it is more feasible to volunteer employee time to causes. Each of these acts makes a small impact to non-profits, yet I would encourage you to be more intentional in your philanthropic efforts. You can leverage your giving programs to align with your organizational strengths, demographics of your workforce, company values or some combination of the above. Community involvement can also really impact the type of job candidates you attract and employees you retain. When your company is committed to doing good, it feels good to the

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employees and it makes good in the broader community.

Whatever you do, I encourage you to be consistent, so employees and the broader community understand the causes you do, and do not, fund through financial contributions or volunteer time.

I can't fund everything! Focusing your Philanthropy

I was very fortunate to be part of a Community Resource Committee during my 9 years at Colder Products in St. Paul. We were a cross-functional team that crafted our "Pillars of Giving" that are still in use today: <http://www.colder.com/AboutUs/Careers/CommunityCommitment.aspx>". There is no right or wrong emphasis, but pillars do provide clarity, focus and a basis for making giving decisions. Based on company values and workforce demographics, our group created guidelines for giving focused on:

- Diversity Outreach (about half of the workforce had English as a 2nd or 3rd language)
- Children and Families (the company supports work/life balance and hosts family events)
- Jobs & Education (a segment of the workforce were engineers or other degreed professionals, while an equal number had not benefited from a formal education.)
- Health-related issues (lots of runners and bikers in the company)

Leveraging Philanthropy to further organizational goals and brand:

What is your company well known for? Can you use these strengths to do good while increasing market awareness of your company in the community?

- If your strength is marketing, set up a program that permits employees a given number of paid time off hours per year to provide pro bono marketing to the non-profit of their choice, or select a couple of specific non-profits to support as an organization. Non-profits often have Board members that may have a need for your services.
- If you offer construction expertise, consider Habitat for Humanity. It is a great way to build visibility the community and give your non-construction employees experience swinging a hammer. You could also work with a local technical college to provide internships to students in the woodworking program.
- If you are focused on efficiency and lean manufacturing, schedule a morning to pack meals at Feed My Starving Children – they have a fantastic lean production layout!

The possibilities are endless. Organizations can make a great impact in their communities, improve their visibility and recruit great employees through a focused giving program that won't break the bank.