

OC LEADER BOARD

Opinion, Analysis, Insight

Three Tips on Changing Dynamics of Corporate Social Responsibility

By Autumn Strier, MPA

Co-Founder, CEO Miracles for Kids

Beyond profitability, today's consumers and employees expect businesses to demonstrate a significant positive impact on the world around them through efforts nowadays known as Corporate Social Responsibility, or CSR.

To gain or retain the loyalty of consumers and employees, CSR programs need to go beyond ethical operations at the C-suite level to form a purpose-driven culture where executives and employees work together to benefit the community at large.

I've had the honor of working with some of our area's most inspirational business leaders, who have aligned their corporate identity with social impact, and as a result, they have affected significant change for critically-ill children and families served by my organization.

When a family is brought down by the devastation of a critically-ill child, we step in to provide long-term stability by paying their bills, housing them and providing counseling, food and clothing.

Executives know that CSR generates good will and thus helps their bottom lines. They also want to contribute to their communities. Their dedication brings incredible benefit to the work of nonprofits throughout OC and can serve as an inspiration to all business leaders considering CSR growth in their own entities.



A Miracles for Kids fundraiser last month generated \$3M. Top executives attending: Ken Cruse, co-founder and CEO of SCP; Autumn Strier, co-founder and CEO of Miracles for Kids; Norm Christensen, CEO of AAE Aerospace; and Henry Walker, president of Farmers & Merchants Bank

to participate in CSR efforts.

Through its partnership with Miracles for Kids, Irvine-based **Xponential Fitness Inc.** (NYSE: XPOF) engages its employees and franchisees in numerous ways, including fundraisers at its Club Pilates locations and sending StretchLab employees to do warm-up activities with critically ill children and families during Miracles' Surf & Paddle summer camps.

It also adopts families, hosts holiday decorating events that benefit residents in our housing complex Miracle Manor, and creates custom engagement events that connect employees and friends of the company with year round assembly and delivery programs.

Xponential, founded in 2017 by **Anthony Geisler**, is one of the world's largest boutique fitness brand owners, providing a wide variety of workout experiences, from indoor rowing and cycling to dance and Pilates.

3. Collaborate with your nonprofit partner to create a customized CSR program.

Today's most successful nonprofits understand that our role is to come alongside our partners to help them design meaningful CSR programs that have an altruistic impact, while also building brand awareness, equity and loyalty and engaging and retaining employees and clients.

In addition to traditional volunteer and sponsorship opportunities, Miracles for Kids has a specialized corporate partnership program, creating custom programs that fit and flex with each company's structure. Each of our programs also includes marketing value through custom-designed collateral, microsites, social media, and email campaigns.

Laguna-Beach based **McClain Cellars**, founded by **Jason and Sofia McClain**, recently announced the launch of its first CSR program to its 1,100+ wine club members.

The program, benefiting Miracles for Kids, impacts the community in alignment with the company's core ethos—Friends, Family, Faith and Freedom. Their hope is to instill giving as a way of living at McClain, with custom wine labels, events and specialty products dedicated to raising funds for those we serve.

By finding creative new ways to incorporate CSR into its core profile, the company is making its dedication to community known as integral to their brand, a strategy that is proven to cultivate and retain employees, clients and retail customers.

Their ethos paid off when they won a Business Journal Family-owned Business award in August.

Looking for Authenticity

Consumers, employees and investors crave authenticity, alignment and purpose from the companies they buy from, work for, and invest in.

A strategic and robust CSR program is a powerful way to communicate your values and positive impact to those who support your business and to create long-lasting, mutually beneficial relationships between your company, your constituencies and the community.

Increasingly, CSR is a critical factor in business' success and survival for the long run. ■

Editor's Note: Autumn Strier in 2004 co-founded Miracles for Kids, an Irvine-based nonprofit that reported \$4.3 million in revenue for the 12-month period ended June 30. On Oct. 16, about 400 guests attended its 17th Annual Night of Miracles at the Ritz-Carlton in Laguna Niguel, raising about \$3 million. Before starting the organization, Strier worked for Morgan Stanley, NYC Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and the National Multiple Sclerosis Society in New Jersey. Strier has an MPA from NYU and resides in South Orange County with her husband, Keith Strier, VP Worldwide AI Initiatives for Nvidia, their three children and four dogs.

The Tips

Here are three key tips to consider as you launch or grow your CSR program:

1. Match CSR to your company's DNA.

To earn loyal customers, investors and engaged employees over time, a CSR program must be an integral part of a company's culture.

To identify your perfect philanthropic match, begin by considering what aspects of the global or local community your business impacts—this will lead you to the most meaningful CSR program that addresses the interests, concerns and passions of your customers and employees.

For example, Laguna Beach-based **Soul Community Planet (SCP)** is a holistic hospitality company that owns seven boutique hotels. SCP recently launched its "Every Stay Does Good" program to drive measurable positive impacts via three partner nonprofits that embody the company's core values.

Through its partnership with **Miracles for Kids**, SCP supports "Community" at each of its hotel locations throughout the West, funding the lighting of a home of one family caring for a critically-ill child for 24 hours. To date, the partnership has helped fund nearly 150,000 hours of light for Miracles for Kids families in need.

SCP was co-founded in 2018 by **Ken Cruse**, who just added his first OC property to SCP's portfolio, and has a goal of deploying nearly \$500 million in new hotel investments in the coming years. Cruse, the former chief executive of **Sunstone Hotel Investors**, is chairman of our foundation.

2. Involve your employees from the start.

Research published by the National Institute of Health shows that companies that incorporate CSR into their organizational fabric in ways that allow employees to express their authentic selves—by participating in/giving to causes they care about—and who provide support for those philanthropic opportunities during work hours enjoy greater employee engagement.

In my experience, organizations that engage their employees in finding causes and issues that resonate, and then cross reference those findings with the right nonprofit DNA fit for the company overall, have greater success with their CSR programs.

It's also critical to provide employees with plenty of opportunities

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