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Socially Responsible Businesses are Good for Community Health

By Donna L. Hamilton, MD, MS, FAAP

Being healthy is more than simply not being sick. For example, Webster describes it as “universal good condition.” Using Webster’s standard, one can better understand the parallels between healthy communities and healthy people, as well as the impact of socially responsible businesses (SRBs) on both.

Healthy communities, just like healthy people, perform optimally in all areas. For example, healthy people flourish physically and emotionally. They maintain uplifting thoughts. They have social relationships that enhance their quality of life. They also have belief systems that help them successfully navigate the pitfalls of life.

Healthy communities share many of these attributes. They flourish physically by maintaining fresh air and clean water. They also offer resources promoting exercise, nutrition, safety and relaxation for its residents. Prudent laws and policies promote good mental and emotional health by helping towns run wisely and harmoniously. The healthiest neighborhoods also have an infectious hometown spirit that encourages residents to support local projects, motivates neighbors to socialize, and fosters a sense of camaraderie and cohesiveness.

SRBs foster many of these attributes and thus, enhance community health. For example, many SRBs implement environmentally respectful policies. This supports the community’s physical well-being. Frequently, SRBs also offer company wellness programs, which enhance employee health. Staff volunteerism, which has been shown to have individual health benefits, is also frequently encouraged. Volunteerism also benefits the community through direct service and by increasing morale.

SRBs also promote community health by encouraging socially responsible behavior. By definition, SRBs actively seek to maximize their positive impact and to minimize their negative impact. In addition to tangible outcomes, such as environmental effects, they usually strive to function with high moral and ethical standards. As a result, SRBs elevate business standards by demanding their vendors and associates also behave in a



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socially responsible manner. This fosters altruism and good will throughout the community, which enhances mental and emotional health.

Motivated SRBs also support their community by partnering with likeminded nonprofit organizations. For example, Foodshare (www.foodshare.org), a Hartford, CT based nonprofit organization, works with local grocery stores and restaurants to provide healthy food to people in need. In addition to providing food, the partnership also benefits the planet by eliminating products that would have otherwise gone into a landfill.

This arrangement benefits everyone. It directly benefits the community's health by helping to end hunger. It also benefits the environment because it decreases waste going into the landfill. The employees and volunteers working with the program reap the personal health benefits from volunteerism. The businesses providing food benefit financially, in addition to gaining satisfaction from their social responsibility, because they do not have to pay to dispose of food they do not use.

As consumers become more discerning about how they spend their money, businesses can increase their appeal by supporting community health. Doing so is easy, affordable, and sustainable. That's good business.

Be well.