Community Relations

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In public relations, there are many jobs that we must manage in order to perform our duties effectively. Depending on the situation, you may be dealing with anything from media relations, social media, internal relations, and even international relations. In this paper however, we will be looking into the importance of community relations. We want to know why community relations are such an important aspect to every business and organizations and how we can improve our own community relations. We will be looking at what corporations are doing now, why they are doing it, and how the success of these community relation programs can be measured.

Community relations have come a long way since public relations first came onto the business scene. There was a time when public relations were put on the backburner in order to establish maximum profitability for almost every company. To showcase this Dunlap (1996) wrote:

If you’re in business, you’re in business for one thing—to make money. You must do everything fiducial, legal, and moral to achieve that goal. And making excellent products that are expertly marketed is the primary way of making money. Executives who run their businesses to support social causes—such as Ben and Jerry’s or The Body Shop—would never get my investment dollars. They funnel a portion of profits into things like saving whales or Greenpeace. That is not the essence of business. If you want to support a social cause, if you have other agendas, join the Rotary International. (p. 199)

Since that time, in 2004, corporations put up $12 billion to support non-profit organizations (*Giving USA*, 2005). These numbers show just how important supporting their community is—Dunlap would not have approved. However, donations are not the only way these businesses are putting their best foot forward within the community. According to the article *Corporate Philanthropy and Corporate Community Relations: Measuring Relationship-Building Results* by Margarete Hall, companies are also doing community relations programs, cause-related marketing endeavors, business-nonprofit partnerships, sponsorships, and corporate volunteer programs. These are just a few of the ways corporations are thinking outside of the box to show those around them, especially those within the community, that they care. To become a trusted company, according to Burke (1999) said a company must have a viable community relations program that will:

Build sustainable and ongoing relationships with key community individuals, groups, and organizations, institute practices and procedures that anticipate and respond to community expectations, concerns, and issues, focus the community support programs to build relationships, respond to community concerns, and strengthen the community’s quality of life. (p. 28)

All of this money, all of this time, with no immediate financial gain; why? A growing body of research in the field of public relations (Ledingham,2003) has studied the impact of community relations on the relationship between an organization and its consumers. Ledingham and Bruning (2001) noted that research within the past 20 years has advised that community relations activities provide many positive mechanisms for an organization. It is a way to receive feedback from its publics, allow the organization to monitor the concerns of groups in the community who might support or oppose the organization, and minimize the negative impacts of crises (p. 529). In the past, corporations have measured the results of their corporate citizenship activities by looking at impact on sales—how the numbers improved since the community relations program started, employee attitudes—are the people of the business happy with how their company is seen in the public eye, management support—how management supports the goals of the company, media coverage—improving how the company is being seen in the media, and working relationships with stakeholders (Yankey, 1996).

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