



Taking Responsibility

When the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) first emerged in the 1970s, it saw organisations voluntarily taking steps to improve the quality of life for employees and their families, as well as for the local community. Business Ireland asks what role does it have today?

IN THE INCREASINGLY conscience-focused marketplaces of the 21st century, the demand for more ethical business processes and actions is increasing. Simultaneously, pressure is applied on industry to improve business ethics through new public initiatives and laws.

Seeing as most businesses draw their employees (along with their related performances) from local communities, it makes perfect sense for them to give something back. Whether it is computers for schools or equipment for local sports clubs, CSR combines the twin approaches of promoting a positive brand awareness together with a display of conscience-boosting corporate awareness.

Not every company will be instinctively aware of the needs of the local community, or how to go about acquiring this information. However, there are options for those left facing this sort of dilemma.

CSR Specialists

GMJ Associates are specialists in CSR and business ethics. They examine the culture and values within an organisation to ensure that they support its long-term viability in the marketplace and its strategic plan. This helps company executives identify potential problems which may threaten the long-term survival and health of the organisation and implement corrective action.

According to Grainne Madden, founder of and senior consultant in GMJ, generic training programmes are not the answer for those companies looking to reach out to their wider community. Something a little more tailored can be required in order to create a fresh corporate culture.

"Every organisation's culture is different and training is far more effective if it can connect with the culture. We have developed programmes with a specific purpose in mind for organisations, such as to enable the introduction of a new code of conduct," says Madden.

Over the last decade, companies began facing new problems connecting with their employees and members of the local communities. Widespread immigration to Ireland, with workers attracted by stories of the elusive Celtic Tiger, ensured that businesses have come to be more proactive, rather than reactive, when it came to dealing with issues of community engagement.

"We have had a lot of interest from companies in multicultural awareness training. In the last few years many Irish businesses found themselves with a multicultural workforce, rather than planning for it, and it can create problems," confirms Madden.

Companies can deal with these problems through complying with Irish or European laws, however Madden feels it is more important that a business acts in an ethical manner for the right reasons, rather than just because they have to.

"I've found that compliance naturally follows in organisations that resonate with a strong sense of values and purpose. People in these workplaces understand what is expected of them and have a sense of the impact of their behaviour and actions on others," Madden concludes.

Helping Communities

Chambers Ireland's Presidents Awards for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) aim to recognise the work carried out by companies in Ireland in improving the lives of their employees and enhancing the civic environment in which they operate.

This is a unique competition offering the business community a chance to promote their efforts in CSR and gain recognition for best practice. With a growing emphasis put on these issues, competition is fierce. There are a number of different categories within these awards, ranging from the Community Award to the award for Best New and Innovative CSR Project. *Business Ireland* has reviewed a number of companies that have been outstanding in their field. ◀