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Key Word Tags	Employee Driven Activities	

START BUT DON'T LEAD

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Quick Summary: The CEO can start but employees need to embrace community involvement programs.

Abstract:

Being successful as a responsible and active corporate citizen can only occur if others lead the charge. Let others in the organization take control, define the program, and oversee its success. The goal is to help the community through the concerted efforts of the company's employees. This will help make "caring" a fundamental building block of the company's culture while making a meaningful difference to the community.

You are the leader; whether you are the founder just starting out or the CEO, everyone will look up to you for guidance in fulfilling your vision. Employees will hang on your every word – whether you intend them to or not. In the 1956 classic movie *The Ten Commandments*, Yul Brynner, as the Pharaoh, made the proclamation "So let it be written, so let it be done". Following orders, "because the boss said so," may lead to blind obedience but will not result in individuals internalizing the intent of the message. In the article in this series, "*There are only Two Kinds of People*," the notion that people are either critics or creators was discussed. People become critics by telling them what to do while people become creators by asking them for their opinions.

A community-oriented "give back program" is best started by the CEO, suggesting that employees, not the company, develop the program on their own. Special emphasis needs to be placed on the concept that spending some of "our" time on this activity is OK. Employees, especially in a young or small company, may feel guilty about "wasting" time on non-company-related activities. The CEO and other senior individuals within the company need to lead by example and commit to becoming involved as participants and not leaders. Ask for others to lead the effort. Find volunteers; you may have to privately set the seeds and request some individuals get involved to jump-start the effort but, at all costs, avoid "the CEO said" impression.

Establish a committee to solicit input from others about the direction and specific activities that could be considered. Let the group make the final decision. Provide oversight or suggest other alternatives be considered only if, because of your position and being privy to information others may not have, you can foresee some potential unintended consequences of the proposed plan. In these days of over-sensitive responses to "politically correct" issues, do not be swayed by remote possibilities of misinterpretations of the intent of the program.

After the committee has been established and plans are underway, occasionally attend a meeting of the group, sitting at the table but not as the leader. Listen more than you talk. As people naturally turn to you for your opinions and decisions, be quiet and let others lead. The group may take an entirely different direction than you initially envisioned. Let them go. The goal is for company-wide involvement in any activity that can impact any portion of the community. Although the primary goal is to help others, the secondary goal will be to build a “caring” culture within the company.

Do not try to boil the ocean with a grandiose plan. Instead, suggest (do not tell) the organizers that they should start small and focus on short-term success. Over time, suggest that the program be expanded as others, who have seen the initial success are drawn in and want to participate. Suggest that the group consider diverse activities to appeal to a broader base of employees. Finally, celebrate all victories publically. Let others take the lead in reporting results. Say thank you and mean it. Empower others to lead the charge in doing good deeds.