

The changing profile of a CSI Head

By: *Sizile Mabaso*

Appointing an appropriate individual is the first step in the effective and efficient management of CSI funds. The requirements and obligations put on companies these days make it imperative to ensure that the individual in charge of driving the company's CSI strategy understands the company's business strategy, values and obligations to stakeholders.



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The individual must also have a fair understanding of the socio-economic challenges facing the country as well as key development strategies on which most programs that are initiated and implemented are based.

He/she must be an individual who is able to marry the company's business imperatives with the CSI strategy. The impact of the company's CSI spending and its reputation with targeted communities depend on the quality and depth of the individual in charge.

Through CSI, companies deal with a wide range of NGOs who are highly skilled and experienced in their field of specialisation. These NGOs are basically partners of the company and representatives of the civil society and the stakeholder community. The CSI Head is not only the face of the company's community involvement, but also a representative of what the company stands for, its depth of knowledge and views on socio-economic development as well as the level of commitment that the company assigns to the socio-economic development.

Mutual understanding

The CSI Head, therefore, needs to be able to engage meaningfully and in an informed manner with NGOs and government representatives with whom the company partners in various programs. If the CSI Head does not understand the issues facing NGOs and the various development partners, his/her contribution to the holistic management of the initiatives supported by the company will be minimal at best and, at worst, will hinder and compromise the effectiveness of the partnerships between the company and its beneficiaries.

This also tends to be seen as reflective of the company's level of commitment and understanding of community development. All of which is not good for the company. Many NGOs find themselves in a conundrum from time to time where they have to deal with some of the most ludicrous views from CSI Heads and are reluctant to challenge them because they fear that doing so will compromise their chances of receiving funding. An experienced CSI Head knows that there is a great deal that companies could learn by engaging with NGOs and community structures in a manner that recognises these entities as partners. Unfortunately due to inexperience some CSI Heads reduce this to a donor/beneficiary relationship with the former being in control.

Passion with experience

NGOs are on the ground and are in contact with the day to day challenges at community level and therefore are an invaluable source of information for companies. Information obtained from these partnerships could be used effectively to inform the company's CSI strategy, funding focus and approach which can only enrich the work that the company

does at community level and enhance its relationships with its community partners. The strenuous requirements placed on companies today with regard to the management of CSI demands that companies should reflect seriously on their choice of candidate for this job. The days when people who have "always wanted to give" or "just loved children" were appropriate for the job are long gone. There is nothing wrong with that kind of passion as long as it comes with the experience, knowledge and skills required to ensure that all stakeholders are able to achieve the desired, visible and sustainable impact.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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[21 Oct 2008 12:36]

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