[When the World Needs You to Be a Superhero … Embedding CSR into Your Corporate Culture](https://www.projectgood.work/drafts/2019/8/28/when-the-world-needs-you-to-be-a-superhero-embedding-csr-into-your-corporate-culture)

Around the world America has been a beacon of light because of its founding values but, like all civilizations that thrive and grow to have enormous power; the country is being tested to see what the people value, and if they want to make a positive difference in the world through their everyday actions. On the news we find people angry and fighting for rights of all kinds, global disasters slowly unfolding, political uncertainty, and youthful killers.

In today's atmosphere, it is important that if you have a voice in a society that you learn to use it wisely since the consequences are far-reaching. Celebrities, politicians, organizations, and companies need to be on their toes as individual members of society regularly pull out the magnifying glass looking to finding anything that doesn’t jive with their brand.

Instead of taking the ostrich approach and putting our heads in the sand waiting for everything to blow over; I thought about how those that have major influence and everyday individuals can team up for the positive in America.

To help show the way, I reached out to the leading expert who coined the term “Do Well by Doing Good,” the internationally-respected cross-sector partnership and cause marketing expert Bruce Burtch. For over 40 years, Mr. Burtch, known as the “Father of Cause Marketing”, has provided workshops, training and created partnerships between the for-profit, nonprofit, education and government sectors which ignited their economic and social environmental impact, while focusing on creating a greater good. Burtch has served as Public Affairs Manager for Marriott Corporation, Public Relations Director of the United States Olympic Committee, Director of Marketing & Communications for the American Red Cross Bay Area chapter and founded The William Bentley Agency. He also founded three nonprofit organizations, authored [*Win-Win for the Greater Good*](http://www.bruceburtch.com/)and was awarded the *Distinguished Leadership Award* by the National Association of Community Leadership.

Like many people, I am a fan of superheroes and felt that the time has come where we need one. Burtch fits the bill of a superhero because he has helped countless companies find their inner hero and propel their companies, organizations, and employees to heights they had never seen before. Now you may ask how has one man been able to do that?

It started back in the '70s when Burtch was a young man and made the professional decision that his life motto would be “ I want to do well by doing good,” and he spent 40 years doing that by showing companies and non-profits how to work together through what is called corporate social responsibility (CSR).

Now many people have heard the term but, may not understand it, so I had Burtch explain it to me with his definition. According to Burtch, corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a business model that helps a company be socially accountable — to itself, its stakeholders, and the public.

Still, the definition alone does not clarify everything, so I began an interesting conversation with Burtch that helped me to get the do’s and don’ts of CSR.

To begin I started by addressing long-held stereotypes about corporate social responsibility (CSR).

**Is corporate social responsibility only about giving things and philanthropy?** “By this definition, CSR would be a one-way street, which it shouldn't be. Giving things and philanthropy are the same thing, a corporation providing funding, product or services.   However, there is no implied engagement in such a definition.  Corporate social responsibility works best when partnerships are developed between the corporation, employees and stakeholders, and those in the general community or with nonprofits, government or education sectors.   If you are just giving your money and not providing the full resources and brainpower of your organization, your ability to truly create change is greatly limited.”

***Do you think corporations that attach themselves to causes care more about being seen than accomplishing anything?*** “Possibly in some cases but in general, I would say no. There has been so much experience and research in the area of the benefits derived from for-profits working with nonprofits, that you would have to be rather naïve to feel you can receive any tangible benefit by just “being seen.”

Having been involved in cause marketing and cross-sector partnerships for over 40 years, my research has shown that there are [31 benefits that nonprofits can receive](http://www.bruceburtch.com/) by working in partnership with for-profits. However, the real eye-opener is that we found that there are [38 benefits that for-profits](http://www.bruceburtch.com/) can receive by working in partnership with nonprofits. When either side of this equation analyzes the amazing amount of benefits they can receive, they quickly realize that they’re leaving far too many opportunities on the table unless they work together to accomplish each other’s organizational objectives.”

***Is CSR an answer to moral myopia?***  “Absolutely not. Moral myopia is created when an organization does not see or understand the impact of their lack of moral judgment and ethics. CSR is not an answer to such naïve/negative corporate positioning or values.  However, it can certainly promote good values when done correctly.  But the blinders must be taken off to what has been done incorrectly in the past.”

Not surprisingly, these stereotypes are widespread according to an article written by the Harvard Business Review called [*People Think Companies Can’t Do Good and Make Money. Can Companies Prove Them Wrong?*](https://hbr.org/2017/11/people-think-companies-cant-do-good-and-make-money-can-companies-prove-them-wrong) In the initial study, people provided their perceptions of the profitability and overall societal contribution of 40 familiar Fortune 500 firms … Among study participants, profit was strongly negatively associated with perceived value to society.

 The irony is that even with this mistrust of companies, when it comes to doing good, Millennials only want to work for companies that focus on doing good or social impact. The Gallup report on [*How Millennials Want to Work and Live*](https://www.gallup.com/workplace/238073/millennials-work-live.aspx) cites working for organizations with a mission and a purpose ranks of higher importance than money. Since Millennials will soon be the leading generation in the workforce its critical for every organization and company to do some self-examination and incorporate CSR plans and initiatives in their company cultures to thrive.

Burtch backed this finding by noting how imperative it is to the survival of companies in the future.

“Gap used to require their entry-level managers to join a non-profit in the San Francisco Bay Area. They did that and paid for their time. When they would come into the Red Cross as volunteers, paid interns if you will; they would have roles that many times were far above the level of responsibility that they had when they were in their entry-level job or mid-level jobs at Gap. They were getting leadership experience, they were getting exposure to higher levels of management, they were out in their communities helping people that had just lost their home in a flood, fire, earthquake or whatever, so they were bringing back organizational skills that the company could not teach them at that level. It was enormously beneficial to the corporation in that way because they're bringing back higher-skilled experience.

Corporate social responsibility is exceptionally important. From just a pragmatic standpoint, there has been extensive research that has shown that people want to buy products and services from organizations that are doing good in their community and for society.  Millennials have shown to be exceptionally attracted to companies that are doing good.  And it's not just in selling products and services.  Good employees are far more attracted to companies that are involved in corporate social responsibility programs, cause marketing or cross-sector partnerships that have a beneficial effect on their community.

Indeed, there is a very interesting equation here: if your company is doing good for society, you will attract better employees, if your employees are allowed to be engaged in the good that your company is doing, their employee satisfaction rate will be high, if their satisfaction rate is high, there’s a far less likelihood that they will leave for another company.  Thus, your retention rate will remain high and a high retention rate relates directly to a higher bottom line because you’re not paying the estimated 100% to 300% of the salary premium that it takes to hire and train a new employee.  If you do not understand or implement such a policy, you are potentially losing a tremendous amount of benefit to your organization. And importantly, losing out on attracting the best employees."

According to the Governance & Accountability Institute, Inc., sustainability reporting rose dramatically from just 20% of the companies reporting in 2011 to 72% just three years later in 2013.  From 2013 to 2016, the frequency of reporting has maintained with slight increases each year, and went up to 82% in 2016, the latest year the study released.

With such a great increase in CSR programs, it seems that starting a CSR program at any company or organization would be a no-brainer but, in the *article,* [*Most Executives Believe in the Business Case for CSR. So Why Don't They Invest More in It?*](https://hbr.org/2018/09/most-executives-believe-in-the-business-case-for-csr-so-why-dont-they-invest-more-in-it?cm_vc=rr_item_page.bottom&referral=03759) by the Harvard Business Review, it revealed a surprising truth.

*The article noted:*

*In summary, executives were skeptical about CSR, but their skepticism did not stem from a lack of belief in the business case. Rather, the very same psychological process that led them to believe in the business case for CSR (their general worldview/fair market ideology) was preventing them from seeing social problems that are caused by business activities — and that could be addressed by investing in CSR projects.*

*Many academics, nonprofit leaders, and consultants are still trying to convince executives to invest more in CSR by telling them stories about how it will benefit their companies' bottom line. Yet the findings from our recent research suggest that such attempts at convincing executives of the existence of a business case are probably not going to bear the desired fruits of more responsible and sustainable initiatives by companies, for two reasons. First, we find that the majority of executives already believe in the business case for CSR. There is hence no need to convince them of its existence. And second, our findings indicate that the executives who believe in the business case for CSR are also those who have difficulty seeing the problems CSR initiatives are supposed to solve. And since they cannot see the problems, they will not sponsor CSR-initiatives designed to solve them.*

This conundrum has kept many great CSR opportunities from developing into everything they could be. Another obstacle is that many times companies and organizations do not approach the issue in the right mind frame or only brush the surface of the opportunities but, don’t take the time to get “their hands dirty” by developing a true partnership.

Burtch has noted that it is not easy, and has seen companies talk about how important CSR is by becoming part of conferences, talks and using terms such as, cause consciousness, conscious companies, conscious impact, social impact but, never tell anyone how to do it.

Burtch says, “They are missing the boat.”

For CSR initiatives to be successful, there has to be a plan and step-by-step process in place. For companies and organizations that see the light, Burtch makes it clear how to approach CSR successfully.

**Creating Successful CSR Initiatives**

***At what point should companies take on CSR initiatives?*** “From the very day, they begin their business. I was giving a presentation many years ago at Stanford University on this exact topic.  I was strongly recommending that start-up companies embed a cause consciousness into their DNA from the very beginning.  I got some push back by these want-to-be entrepreneurs saying why should they give money away when they would not be making money at the beginning.  And I said, “You are missing the point!”, you are not giving money away you are creating a reputation of doing good. Doing good, will create more business for you and attract better employees.  And if you fear that you don’t have the cash to give away at those early stages, offer community service hours for your employees to engage in their community.  Start small and grow your giving as your company grows.

Corporate social responsibility is usually seen as being done by large regional, national or international corporations.  Corporate social responsibility or embedding a cause consciousness can be done with the startup, a local hardware store, … any size company.  The focus of my book was on the well over 1 million nonprofit and for-profit organizations that were small to midsize.  I had seen in my research that these were the organizations that did not think that such programs would work for small organizations. They are wrong.”

Burtch believes and lives by a specific approach when it comes to developing CSR initiatives.

“In my opinion, the most important first step in addressing what initiatives they should attach themselves to is to determine their corporate values. Once they are clear on their vision, business objectives, and values, they should seek out initiatives that are in line with this vision, business objectives, and values. There should be a strong commonality and alignment between the corporate position and the position of the initiative or nonprofit they are working with.  If not, the customers and communities will see a disconnect.  The initiative will not make sense and therefore it will not work, or at least, not work well.

As I like to say: the goal of each partner should be to do everything in their organization's ability to make the partnership successful for their partner. This focus on achieving mutual goals is the foundation for successful CSR initiatives.  
  
In 1975 I designed a partnership between the March of Dimes and Marriott Corporation.  Marriott is a family-based organization in the hospitality industry.  The March of Dimes is focused on improving the health of babies by preventing birth defects, premature birth and infant mortality. Both organizations are family-focused. The alignment between these two organizations made sense.  The partnership we developed raised $2.5 million for the March of Dimes in 1976, 40% more than had ever been raised in the history of March of Dimes in their Western region.  This partnership has been hailed as the first “cause marketing” program in history.  It worked, exceptionally well, because we were not only well aligned but we worked hard to achieve the marketing objectives of both organizations.”

**The True Key to CSR Success**

The major way to set-up your organization or company for a successful CSR initiative is to incorporate the budget throughout every department in the organization.

“A lot of times there’s a CSR budget. And I think that’s kind of a naïve way of looking at it. Let’s take some of our advertising promotional budget, let’s take some of our media relations budget, let’s take some of our HR budget. In other words, if it’s going to affect all these different departments and silos within an organization, tap those silos so you can do something robust. So, it’s not just okay to say to your CSR director, “You’ve got half a million dollars to do a CSR program.”

Burtch mentions that to guarantee embedding the initiative into the organization it must be completely adopted at the C-suite level, he mentions that the company or organization needs a champion to lead the development of the CSR initiative.

Another insider’s pointer Burtch offered, which is often overlooked by companies is running a communication audit of the company before doing a CSR initiative.

During a real-life client experience, Butch remembers that he encountered a company communication breakdown as he was initially researching the development of a CSR initiative for a pharmaceutical data client. By doing a communication audit before developing the CSR program, it led to seeing a need for a company restructure before beginning the initiative. After the restructure was in place, they were able to ensure integrated communication in the company and produce a successful CSR program launch which helped take the company to a whole different level in the community and financially.

***Lastly, for non-profit organizations, Burtch says don't ask for money.***

I've had people look at me like I am unrealistic when I've talked to them about this. I hear this from non-profits all the time. (Take this beginning out "We're just too busy to do that. We just want to go ...) “I almost walked off a stage in Kansas one time. I had 400 non-profit executives in the room and I'm talking about this idea of building partnerships and one guy raises his hand, he said, "I don't have time to do that. We are so busy." And I said, "Do you want me just to open up my Rolodex (how's that for an old term,) takeout: "Do you want me just to open up my Rolodex and give you a couple of numbers of CEOs that I know who have money?" And everyone in the room raised their hand. I almost walked off the stage, I'll never forget this. I stood there looking at these 400 executives from four different states. (take out: I looked at them) and I said, "You don't understand. You don't walk into a company and ask for money. You walk into a company and you say how can we build a partnership that will benefit you?" Because they know you're coming to them to benefit your organization. You put their needs first.

I have innumerable examples that I've worked with companies or non-profits who did that.

For example, one time helping a client, I said, "When we get into this meeting, do not ask for money. Tell them how their employees can get engaged with you." And the two women that ran the organization said, "Don't ask for money? We need money." I said, "They know you need money." So, we walk into this meeting, it was supposed to be 20 minutes, and 45 minutes later all five employees on their community relations committee (take out :all) volunteered to work for this small organization in Marin County. They were so moved by what this organization was trying to do. One of them finally said, "Do you need money?" The two women that were with me (take out: looked at me, and) said, "Well yes, yes, we'd love a donation." They gave them two times the normal donation they have ever given to a first-time organization request. And it was 60% of that organization’s budget.

When CSR is done right, it leads to automatic reciprocation. When organizations and companies team up to look to meet the needs of their partner, before themselves it creates a symbiotic relationship that has a lasting ripple effect on both businesses, the communities they serve, the employees, and individuals that use the services or products.

“You want to do more good because you’ll do better. It’s a wonderful virtuous cycle if you will. The more you do what works, the more you’re going to want to do. The last step to my program is rejoice, revise and repeat.”

**Learn More:** To find out more about developing a successful CSR program for your company or organization go to:  <http://www.bruceburtch.com/> and download Bruce Burtch's free guidebook Win-Win for the Greater Good.

**About Bruce Burtch**

Called the “Father of Cause Marketing”, Bruce Burtch retired as an internationally-respected cross-sector partnership and cause marketing expert. For over 40 years, Burtch provided workshops, training and created partnerships between the for-profit, nonprofit, education and government sectors which ignited their economic and social environmental impact, while focusing on creating a greater good.

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