COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IS JUST GOOD BUSINESS

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

• Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a term that has been around since at least the 1960s. It refers to the behaviour of businesses to have a positive social impact, and to reduce the negative impact of their operations.

• Good CSR can include practices and activities such as: reducing the company’s environmental footprint (recycling, reducing energy use); protecting the human rights of workers and people in the communities where the business works; ensuring materials used by the business are ethically-sourced (for example, ensuring cloth for clothing is not produced by child labour); and corporate philanthropy—donating some of the business’ profits to charity.

• Every year, the magazine Corporate Knights publishes a list of the 50 Canadian companies it believes are the best “corporate citizens”—have the best CSR. In 2013, the B.C. credit union Vancity was ranked number one. Vancity was praised for action like: supporting affordable housing, investing in social entrepreneurs, and encouraging its employees to use environmentally-friendly transportation. Vancity even started a garden on the roof of its headquarters office, and gives the vegetables to low-income families in Vancouver.

• A 2007 report by Imagine Canada found that 82 per cent of all Canadian businesses believe it is “very or somewhat important to contribute to the community because it’s a good thing to do, irrespective of the financial returns to the company.”

• A 2006 survey of 900 Canadian businesses found that 53 per cent encouraged their employees to get involved in community volunteering.

NOTE TO EDUCATORS

The following activities are designed to stimulate a current events discussion. Generative in nature, these questions can be a launching point for additional assignments or research projects.

Teachers are encouraged to adapt these activities to meet the contextual needs of their classroom.

In some cases, reading the article with students may be appropriate, coupled with reviewing the information sheet to further explore the concepts and contexts being discussed. From here, teachers can select from the questions provided below. The activity is structured to introduce students to the issues, then allow them to explore and apply their learnings. Students are encouraged to further reflect on the issues.

KEY TERMS

Corporate social responsibility—the responsibility that companies have to the societies they operate in. It is a commitment to behave ethically with regards to social, environmental and economic actions.

Core competency—A basic skill necessary to do your job.

Bottom line—A business term that refers to the final tally of expenses and income—whether the business made a profit or loss.
THEMES AND COURSE CONNECTIONS
- Themes: Volunteering, Values and Ethics, Employment, Economy
- Course Connections: Business Studies, English, Career Studies, Interdisciplinary Studies

MATERIALS
- Front board
- Computers with internet capabilities
- Paper and writing utensils
- Give Where You Live slideshow (text version available in the lesson package)

SPECIFIC EXPECTATIONS AND LEARNING GOALS
Students will:
- Develop and express responses to issues and problems.
- Reassess their responses to issues on the basis of new information.
- Participate in active group work and class discussions.
- Communicate effectively in oral, visual or text form.
- Demonstrate the ability to think critically.
- Develop, express and defend a position on an issue.

MAP IT
Have students locate the different countries mentioned in the article to gain an understanding of the international expanse of the issues.
- India
- Sub-Saharan Africa
- Pakistan

DISCUSS
1. What does the phrase “community involvement is just good business” mean? Do you agree that it is good for business? How is this statement true?
2. What is the definition of Corporate Social Responsibility? What does it mean to “cut a cheque”? Do you agree that the practice of recycling programs and writing a big cheque to a charity is no longer good enough? Why or why not?
3. The article states that employees are assessed, in part, by their community involvement and engagement. Therefore, if you want to get ahead in the company volunteering is an important consideration. Do you agree with this practice? Why or why not?
4. What are the benefits of making community giving and volunteering a core business activity?
5. Millennials—roughly those born in the early 1980s to the early 2000s—are said to be different consumers than the generations that came before. One reason they are considered different is the belief that they will spend more on products that come with social and environmental benefits. From your experiences as a consumer and based on other consumers you know, do you agree? Why or why not?
6. Considering the example of Costco from the article, would you shop at a place where employees are being treated better (through pay and/or benefits) more than at a competitor? Other than an increase in consumers, what are the benefits to a company that pays their employees more (e.g., better employee satisfaction and retention). What is important (or would be important) to you as an employee? What are some historic examples of companies that have paid their employees more than average? (E.g., Ford.)

7. It is often mandatory for high school students to complete community service hours in order to graduate, what do you think of this practice? Is corporate social responsibility a natural extension? Do you see this as a shift in our societal beliefs and values?

DIVE DEEPER
Ask students to think about the businesses they patronize. What responsibilities do these businesses have toward the people and communities in which they operate? Do small local shops have different responsibilities than large international corporations? Why? What are the differences?

Tell students that while there is a long history of businesses who felt they held a responsibility to the surrounding community, environment and employees, businesses gauged their success mainly on profit. Recently however, especially in Canada, focus has shifted toward a new style of conducting business, social enterprise and corporate social responsibility. As consumers, we also have a unique opportunity to ask more from the businesses we support. Although profit remains a key measure to success and accomplishment; the activities of socially responsible corporations also determine their success in terms of their social impact.

Instruct students to draw a K-W-L chart in their notebooks. Have students catalogue what they know about corporate social responsibility and what they want to learn about corporate social responsibility on the chart. Instruct students to leave the “learned” column blank; it will be filled in during the slideshow presentation.

Run through the slideshow presentation with your students. Instruct students to take notes from the presentation using either the “learned” column or a separate page in their notes. Ensure they write down not only what is on the slideshow slides, but also what is discussed during the presentation.

At the end of the class ask students to hand in their K-W-L charts. Review them to ensure the slideshow presentation covered everything in the “want to learn” column. To continue the conversation and help students answer any remaining questions in their “want to learn” column check out the continuing lesson plans in the Give Where You Live: Corporate Social Responsibility Lesson Package.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES