



**THREE
HANDS**

BUSINESS : PEOPLE : COMMUNITIES

HAND IN HAND

Three Hands forum, 23rd September 2009

Three Hands' recent half-day forum, 'Hand in Hand', was designed to inform and inspire. In the context of companies' need to embed CSR in the business, the challenge of combining the pursuit of profit with the pursuit of values, employees looking for more meaning in the workplace and the blurring of boundaries between the private and voluntary sectors, we set out to explore the issues, hear about real examples of what companies are doing and learn from experts.

The Somers Town Community Association – a stone's throw from the multi-million pound Eurostar terminal at St Pancras – provided an appropriate setting for a discussion about business and communities working together for mutual benefit. Three Hands takes people out of their usual business settings and this was no exception.

Living our values

Our first speaker was **Tim Brooks, Managing Director of Guardian News & Media (GNM)**. This is an organisation to whom values and being an 'ethical leader' is of real importance – and not just through its editorial. We asked Tim to explain the relevance of community engagement and sustainability to core business activities and he drew on various examples to make the point that there is significant business benefit to be had from a community engagement programme – as part of a wider sustainability agenda – that involves employees sharing their skills for their, and the community's, benefit.

Tim explained that a series of one-day community projects undertaken by the 300 members of the Advertising Sales Department were designed to both develop skills amongst employees and embed GNM values in the department. He also drew on the example of GNM's initiative for new employees; as part of the induction process all new starters will spend time working on a local food growing initiative with charity Global Generation. These are two fantastic examples of embedding sustainability into other business issues.

The LIVE Magazine take-over

Young people are often portrayed negatively in the press and associated with antisocial behaviour. At the same time business knows that teenagers are its customers and future employees, and many companies choose 'young people' as a social theme for their community engagement efforts. That is why the next session was not just about young people – it was by young people.

We invited the **contributors of LIVE Magazine**, a publication controlled entirely by 12 to 21 year olds with the support and guidance of professionals, to take over for 40 minutes. And take us over they did, demonstrating their budding journalism and interviewing skills, reminding us what it's like to be a teenager and, using a well-honed technique, extracting information from delegates on the worst things they got up to as teenagers!

This was an enormously positive portrayal of young people, many of whom are from disadvantaged backgrounds. If any companies are interested in working with them, they would love to hear from you (and Three Hands can put you in touch).





Developing people and developing communities

– views from L&D, CSR and charities

Three Hands runs learning & development programmes for people in business based on real charity projects. So when we planned a panel discussion on this topic, we wanted to explore the views from three key areas – L&D, CSR and the charity sector. All three speakers had experience of learning programmes that benefit the community and all gave fantastically helpful insights.

Sarah Myers, Director of Talent Management at Sky, was very clear that action learning in a real setting “offers people the opportunity to stretch their wings outside of the corporate environment”. If part of CSR is doing the right thing, then “doing the right thing is a core leadership skill”. Charity projects – such as the projects Sky’s Leadership Development Programme participants are undertaking with Sky’s main charity partner Global Action Plan, provide “breadth of thinking and experience”. And it’s not just the Sky employees who learn; representatives from the charity partner are invited to join the development programme, which is an original way of enhancing the partnership.

Graham Precey, Head of CSR at Legal & General, challenged the audience: “If your company’s community programme was the only way to get expertise into your business, how would you run it differently?” His point was that engaging with charities can be a form of research & development – the learning from taking “the external view” can be highly valuable, not just for skills development but also to inform business strategy and product development. That is why Legal & General’s work with Macmillan Cancer Support helps to inform their Life and Critical Illness policies and why their new management development programme includes a module that helps managers to identify the societal issues that are critical to their business.



Benita Refson, Chief Executive of children’s charity The Place2Be, confirmed that from a charity’s point of view learning & development projects can have “enormous mutual benefits”, although she warned us not to work with “chaotic charities”. She emphasised the importance of expectation management – teams from companies should not over-promise on what they can deliver.

Banking on values

To explore the concept of combining the pursuit of values with the pursuit of profit, we invited **Charles Middleton, UK Managing Director of Triodos Bank**, to make the final presentation of the afternoon. Triodos is one of very few banks to have thrived during the recent financial turmoil and Charles explained that its policy to work with businesses “that value people and planet, as well as profit” had contributed to its success. His message that the role of business goes way beyond the creation of shareholder value was a fitting end to the afternoon’s presentations.



A discussion amongst delegates before we wrapped up demonstrated how the speakers had stimulated thoughts, ideas and energy amongst us all. We agreed that ‘return on investment’ on community engagement can be demonstrated through a variety of factors, from the loyalty it develops amongst employees and the understanding it leads to of people who are not your customers, to the breadth of learning experience on offer and reputation amongst new employees. We debated whether there is a ‘middle space’ emerging between businesses and charities and it was suggested that business and communities working together for mutual benefit “puts the heart back into business”. What a good note on which to end the forum!



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