

Responsible business creating values

The Pontis Foundation challenges individuals, communities and last but not least companies to bear responsibility for themselves and the world around them. In this article, AmCham members can find inspiration for some meaningful CSR projects.

Companies creating values in Slovakia: this is the vision that the companies associated with the Business Leaders Forum (BLF) pursue. Corporate responsibility is not generosity beyond business, but rather the way to success. The aim of the BLF is to jointly cultivate the corporate environment and inspire other companies to responsible solutions, which in consequence contribute to increasing employees' productivity, improving companies' reputation and reducing costs.

For nine years, the BLF has been bringing together companies that are leaders in the field of promoting responsible business in Slovakia. "Corporate responsibility must be inextricably linked to the everyday performance of the company, relationships with its customers, employees, suppliers and the environment," says Beata Hlavčáková, the Executive Director of BLF and the Program Director of the Pontis Foundation.

New partners are invited

Work-life balance, support for low-emission transportation, active aging at work, and responsible contractors are just some of the topics jointly addressed by the representatives of the companies in the BLF. This year, BLF has organized a number of interesting seminars and has issued practical recommendations containing some examples of measures that

respond to the current challenges and that may be beneficial for both the company itself and society. Companies can thus learn more about the contributions of older workers, the costs that can be saved, the advantages of having responsible suppliers and improving their risk management.

BLF currently has 25 members. "We keep growing every year. This year, we have been joined by Tatra banka, Bayer and Dalkia, who are committed to corporate responsibility. I do believe that more companies that want to change Slovakia for the better will join us soon," says Beata Hlavčáková. One of the major events in the field of CSR is the successful Central European CEE CSR Summit organized by the Pontis Foundation every year. Its preparation for next year is in full swing.

Companies support transparency and anti-corruption

A year ago some of the member companies of the BLF established the Fund for Transparent Slovakia. The Fund supports organizations that have yet demonstrated extraordinary stamina to fight corruption, its causes and consequences. Thanks to legal experts cooperating with Via Iuris and the analyst of Transparency International Slovakia, Health Policy Institute and Fair-play Alliance, the public learned about individual cases. The above-mentioned

organizations strive to stop the waste of public resources.

"We consider the work of these organizations to be basically the same as the function of white blood cells in an organism. Our society is also an organism that works in a particular way and if it loses its immunity, its existence is ended. Therefore, function of these cells is important for us as a society to survive," says spokesperson Ján Orlovský from Západoslovenská energetika.

According to Marek Gešo, Marketing and Communications Lead at Accenture, the Fund for Transparent Slovakia is an imperative. "For me, the existence of the Fund for Transparent Slovakia is about giving these NGOs a chance to focus on what they are good at – acting as a watchdog. I am sure when corrupt behavior in society is suppressed (as results already indicate) at least partially it will be beneficial for all other areas – healthcare, education, and many other."

The companies are systematically seeking to contribute to the improvement of the business environment in Slovakia. "Respect, trust and responsibility towards our employees, business partners and our company belong to our core values. Therefore our support of the Fund for Transparent Slovakia is a logical result of our long-term efforts in this area," says Door Platenga, General Director of Heineken Slovakia. Companies that make ethical behavior and transparency natural parts of their business spread

these values also into the public life. Therefore, other companies are also welcome to join us in order to help us fulfill this vision.

Lawyers help non-profit organizations

Nearly 70 lawyers and law offices provide free legal assistance to charitable organizations via the Lawyers Pro Bono Program established in 2011 by the Pontis Foundation. Pro bono is a Latin abbreviation for "pro bono publico" denoting professional work provided free of charge or for a symbolic price, but for the great public benefit. Within this program lawyers are connected with many truly credible charitable organizations that need the pro bono assistance. Associations, foundations and other community initiatives may result in longer and more effective assistance for a greater number of children, senior citizens, people with mental or physical disabilities, the homeless, families in crisis, refugees and nature.

In November 2013, the first annual meeting of lawyers involved in the Pro Bono Program took place. These informal discussion meetings provide space for sharing experiences of pro bono work, developing program activities, introducing current trends and networking. The annual meetings will always be associated with the seminars prepared in cooperation with selected non-profit organizations, focusing on the situation in the subject area, the impact on society, effective solutions and necessary legal assistance. These will be the subject of a long-term cooperation between the lawyers within the working group.



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