

Five tips for a meaningful CSR program at your company

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Just a few years ago, we at Henkel Slovensko, used to support anything from art exhibits, through libraries and hockey tournaments to puppy shelters. It led to a stressful process, but also diluted results. To improve the outcome, we took a brave step and picked just one cause: senior citizens.

We selected this group as the focus of our CSR efforts, since they often tend to be neglected by the society and we saw an opening that not many other companies were fulfilling. Once we started to explore this direction, we realized, it is not a stretch to our purpose either. Seniors nowadays are different than many years ago, they want to be active, educate themselves and spend their free time together with the younger generation. Trying to bridge the intergenerational gap, we found a new business opportunity in hiring older employees, who have become a welcome addition to our young teams.

In its first year, our new CSR program rebranded simply as Henkel helps, has reached 650 seniors and thanks to over 100 volunteers created partnerships with 11 organizations.

Before we get into what helped us get there, here is something you should know: CSR strategy is not a task of Marketing, or HR or the CEO. It must be a combination of them all, and more. Only if there is understanding and support for what you are trying to achieve at the higher places and enough man power to do the legwork, can the project really grow in significance.

Meaningful strategies require magnitude.

That does not mean they need hundreds of thousands of euros, but taking some extra money laying around, sending it to a shelter and earning a pat on the back no longer works. You need to invest in your cause, which can mean funds as well as human capacity. One

does not achieve a great CSR impact by sending out a single "Please, send us your IBAN" email. Coordinating those in need, connecting them with volunteers, navigating HR policies for time away from work, while ordering supplies and thinking of BOZP often translates into a full-time job.



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At Henkel, CSR is steered through the office of the President and Corporate Communication, but many other departments need to participate for it to work. The Legal team consults workplace policies and regulations, while team leaders are needed to "excuse" their employees from work. Often, our efforts come down to the facility workers overseeing filling out of a truck full of products. No one is too small to make an impact.

Share your responsibility.

The support of the Board is essential, as it often ties to funds and human capacity, but you also need those who show up. Those, whose shoulders your program will stand on, are the ones who will fall in love with the cause. Invest into finding them, equipping them with resources

they need and most of all, let them shape the program and make it their own. Bringing a fully detailed plan of action on a silver platter will soon bore the creative ones. Once you lay out the big strategy and main principles, let them seek the organizations, make contacts, schedule their visits or brainstorm their activities.

When we first introduced the new concept, we sent out numerous company-wide calls for anyone to participate. The newly formed group formed our volunteer leaders, who break the big strategy into smaller activities. Thus, they get to participate but in a way that makes them comfortable: some focusing on education, others on entertainment, while some simply want to get their hands dirty and help with manual labor.

Don't discriminate.

Meaningful CSR is not built on outgoing extroverts who immediately fill the room upon entering. Shy introverts can become valuable assets, if you create platforms for them. This turned out to be true even more since the pandemic hit. Before corona struck, some of our CSR activities focused on in-person visits to retirement houses, where our volunteers prepared talk shows or engaged the elderly in crafts projects. However, recent months provided new opportunities to less outspoken people, who started producing a new magazine with tips and entertainment during the quarantine.

Trust your path.

When corona hit, it was easy to get carried away and lose focus as everything was up in the air. Still, we kept with our theme of helping senior citizens, even if we had to improvise. In person visits were replaced by an online entertainment portal and online magazine. Large travel shows that our international employees used to hold to present their homeland, gave way to small product donations. However, the contacts we have built before were just as useful, all we had to do was listen to our partners and adjust our aid to suit their new needs.

Size does not matter.

To really get as close as possible to your community, explore the scale of your activities. A large, multifaceted grant scheme is great, but sometimes sending three employees to meet those you are trying to help and getting their hands dirty matters more.

For us that meant variety. For a second time, we have held a grant program call, distributing 45 000 euros to 113 organizations that are on site, helping seniors affected by the epidemic. Besides large projects, we are allowing room for new needs to be brought to our attention in order to have space to fulfill them. During the pandemic, that also led to partnership with other brands, for ex. with Billa for its *Sused pomôž susedovi seniorovi* project. Once you know your direction, complement your main initiative with smaller ones and don't be afraid to share the spotlight. Most of all, make sure the theme you pick is one that fits your purpose. It will become an integral part of your brand and have an effect on anything from business to partnerships to your attractiveness as an employer.

