

Corporate Social Responsibility v. Corporate Civic Responsibility*

A “corporate social responsibility” (CSR) program generally originates from a corporate entity’s desire to do good things beyond any of its legal, financial or other business obligations. In other words, it is a self-assumed function to express and advance charitable or otherwise positive activities for the benefit of the general society in which it financially prospers. CSR activities are often rooted in a “nice to do” attitude of corporate leaders. They are also a response to pressure from customers, employees, shareholders and social activist groups or NGOs for not doing enough to improve the welfare of the people of the society in which the corporations flourish. In some cases, they are also employed to enhance the image of corporations for public relations purposes. Generally, however, CSR connotes noblesse oblige (at least to some degree), and involves genuine efforts that confer benefits not only upon beneficiaries, but also upon benefactors.

“Corporate civic responsibility” (CCR) suggests an awareness on the part of a business entity of its responsibilities as a corporate citizen. As such, “CCR” programs spring from the hearts of corporate leaders to express and implement their genuine commitment to perform certain activities for the commonweal (public good) because they consider their corporation a legal entity—a corporate citizen. Like a natural citizen, a corporate citizen assumes certain duties beyond any legal obligation, because a corporate citizen is born by an act of incorporation under the laws of a particular jurisdiction.

These laws, which protect the legal interests of the corporate citizen, are enacted, approved, and enforced by elected representatives of the general public and their appointees in that jurisdiction. As such, one can argue that a corporate citizen has a moral or ethical obligation to contribute to the public good because the public is the primary source of those laws. The protections and other

benefits afforded by U.S. corporate citizenship are a primary mechanism that enables and fosters a corporation's success. Hence, a corporate citizen's activities for the public good are "civic activities." Therefore, a corporate responsibility activity to confer benefit upon the general public can be identified appropriately as a CCR program instead of a CSR program because of the moral and ethical obligations derived from a corporation's status as a corporate citizen.

While the manifestations of CSR and CCR efforts may look very much the same – and while both are generally viewed as admirable and beneficial – there is a growing feeling among the public and many government officials that some "CSR" programs originate from an attitude of "nice to do" on the part of many corporate entities merely as an "image creating" public relations tool or a means to foster better (e.g., safer, more efficient, more cost-effective) business practice. At the same time, a genuine CCR program emerges from a selfless desire of a "must do" approach by a corporate entity. Further, it reflects a full commitment to specific benefits for the public good. This is not to say that a corporation will not or cannot benefit from a commitment to CCR; it most certainly can.

It is important to note that while CCR prescribes a "must do" approach to harnessing a business entity's unique capabilities, expertise and resources to make a positive contribution to the common good, this is not a call for new or additional external expectations or requirements. Only the corporate entity itself can mandate or impose such a sense of civic responsibility and the actions, efforts and contributions that accompany it.

In conclusion, a corporate entity that considers itself a model corporate citizen should consider framing and terming its existing appropriate CSR programs and activities as "CCR" programs to deliver a clearer and powerful message regarding their true intentions – to make a positive and indelible impact on society. The term CCR is preferable, more accurate, and more effective for a

corporate citizen's successful expression and implementation of civic programs based on moral and ethical obligations to confer benefits upon the public. At the same time, it must be remembered that whatever a corporation calls its civic activity programs, no such program will succeed unless the corporation has two committed and satisfactory resources in place — financial resources and human resources. Financial resources means sufficient funds are allocated for the full implementation of the program. Human resources means the corporation has a team of fully committed, experienced, and knowledgeable individuals who consider the civic function as not merely a job, but a mission with a vision of the commonweal.

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