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December 2013

Thinking Giving Outside the Box

How do the holidays generate such anticipation and warm feelings in everyone? Maybe we are all children at heart. But as adults, the reason we treasure these few weeks at the end of the year is because they rekindle for us the experience and the value of *appreciation*.

Giving and receiving presents from the heart is only the start. Think of how much more creativity and planning we invest in finding gifts that bring smiles of appreciation. The same with holiday hospitality. Families and friends enjoy getting together many times during the year, yet during the holidays every invitation is enhanced by an extra dose of celebration and festivity. This higher level of shared appreciation gives the food more flavor, the conversation more gaiety, and the symbols and rituals more meaning.

As we experience this power of appreciation, naturally our thoughts go to others who are struggling. Many of us are fortunate to have front row seats for economic recovery. However, for the majority of Americans, good times may still seem far ahead. Our greater measure of affluence inspires us to engage in philanthropy throughout the year, but the holidays offer a unique opportunity to make charitable acts more personal and creative.

Would you like to multiply that feeling of appreciation this year? Here are some ideas to extend your gratitude in small, but very tangible ways throughout our community and assure everyone feels the holiday fullness we all treasure.

Charity and your business

Most of our clients are entrepreneurs who built successful businesses. We recommend you pick a cause that fits your business history, culture, or values that have evolved over the years. You have learned a lot of lessons from the obstacles you overcame and the opportunities you nailed. Is there an analogous cause that strikes a chord? A disability or health problem, an educational boost, a problem entrepreneurs can solve where institutions fall short?

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Starting small can still create big meaning when you involve your employees, suppliers, and customers. Match their contributions of money, and reward their commitments of time. You could partner with a local nonprofit to create seasonal jobs and training in your company for the people they serve. Whatever you choose, set goals, track results, and celebrate milestones as a company.

Charity and your family

Talk to younger children in your family about the real gifts they have earned and have been given, and explain how others are not as fortunate. Create opportunities for them to choose who or what they want to help; people, animals, the environment, anything, and help them research and act on their choices. Welcome their tech skills and resources. Find the right balance of your involvement and theirs. The more you subsidize, the larger the gifts, but the more effort they contribute, the bigger their take-away value.

On a smaller scale, help them expand beyond the canned food delivered to school by involving friends and organizing volunteer opportunities with a holiday theme. If your gift-giving includes the extended family, you can suggest to older children a donation to a charity of another family member they would have bought a present for.

We all know that young people today are digitally exposed to far more shocking news and experiences than generations past. Instead of risking them becoming immune to hardship, help them find opportunities to express their caring impulses and understand that as inheritors of the future they can begin today to change the world by designing it the way they want.

Charity and your community

Virtually every city lists local charities serving citizen needs on the city website. Many have online donation and volunteering systems. This time of year is very important to local charities, particularly as government funding has yet to return to pre-recession levels. No one wants to see charities competing against each other for donations.

The holidays are also the time when much of the charity's work is done (examples: clothing, feeding, providing healthcare, finding homes for pets, toy drives, and more). As a company, an individual, or a family you can help boost results for a spectrum of community needs by giving time and resources to these agencies.

Religious and social organizations also go into a higher gear this time of year. What can you offer to make them more efficient and effective? Provide a van from your business to make deliveries. Arrange a performance by a musical group at care giving facilities. Supply lights to brighten up troubled streets.

The "most wonderful time of the year" can also be the most *creative* time of the year. That way everyone gets more of the wonderful feeling. So think and give outside the box, especially the boxes with bows on top.

Best Regards,

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