



How to build a #CSR Profile

[An article about corporate social responsibility - written for LinkedIn Dec 2016]

Change is possible, inevitable and necessary to enable evolution and sometimes revolution as I discovered when I converted to Veganism, a change I never ever thought that I would make. More about that later. First I want to focus on social responsibility in the corporate world and I will also provide some guidance on how organisations can develop their Corporate Social Responsibility Profile. Let us start with what we know businesses need to do:

- Determine the needs and expectations of their customers (i.e. start conversations, conduct market research etc.);
- Fulfil the needs and expectations of their customers (i.e. continue those conversations and manage/control quality etc.);
- Ensure that laws are not broken (i.e. stay in touch with developments, communicate updates and make sure they are being followed);
- Ensure industry regulations and codes of practice are followed otherwise there may be commercial repercussions (as above comments);
- And this is potentially the big one: explore the needs and expectations of other interested parties (shareholders, staff, society, customers of the future, etc.);

Members of staff who feel uncomfortable about the activities of the organisation they work for may move on and may even give their former employers bad publicity. Even shareholders – whose primary interest may be finance – may also be perturbed if the activities of the company conflict with their values. Society is full of people with very strong opinions about corporate social responsibility and they may make things difficult for companies by spreading negative messages on Facebook or making complaints via Twitter. Typically these concerns are grouped under the following categories:

Human rights (e.g. ensuring diversity, equality etc.)

Ethical trading (e.g. investment in controversial enterprises);

Child welfare (e.g. exploitation and abuse of young employees);

Environmental impacts (e.g. high carbon and methane emissions);

Animal rights (e.g. visits to circuses/zoos, inadvertent contribution to abusive farming);

ISO – the international organisation for standardisation – deals with social responsibility effectively through its ISO 26000 guidance standard and this is ably supported by the ‘Context’ clause in ISO 9001:2015 and ISO 14001:2015. When building a CSR Profile, organisations must take care they don’t ignore intensive farming, the biggest ‘elephant in the room’.

After 40+ years of eating meat I went vegetarian and then – eleven years later at the age of 53 – I went Vegan. For the first time in my life I had faced the truth about the exploitation and abuse going on in many intensive farms which statistically makes up the majority of UK (and global) farming. Talk to most vegetarians and vegans and they will probably cite this as their main reason for changing their diet. Some will also point to the growing set of statistics that prove that high and destructive methane emissions are primarily driven by intensive farming which has become a significant force in climate change (e.g. Chatham House Report, Farming Advice Service, International Arctic Research Centre at University of Alaska Fairbanks etc. etc.).

I have a dog who I absolutely adore. Like many dog lovers I would say I am an ‘animal lover’, but how could I support an industry that treated one animal so much worse than another? In human terms we would call this racism. So what did I learn? That cows typically have their young taken away from them within hours of giving birth and many have testified to the evident fear of the calf and the endless grieving of the mother. These gentle, protective creatures are often treated like worthless objects due to high consumer demand. Statistically it is well documented that the majority of farm animals will not see the light of day in their lifetimes as they are kept in confinement and will suffer a slow and agonising death. The farmers will blame the supermarkets for putting them under pressure who in turn will blame it on consumer demand; this is why only the consumer can put a stop to this.

So now my lifestyle and behaviour has significantly changed and I am expressing views I never had years ago. I am a new member of a highly growing ‘interested party’ and significant movement which



has grown to 542,000 vegans in Britain, a staggering 360% growth in 10 years (Ipsos Mori 2016). The vegan movement speaks on behalf of another interested party that has no voice other than the cry of loss and the scream of pain. The Animal Welfare Act (UK) 2006 was based around “The Five Freedoms”, one of which is the “freedom to express normal behaviour”. This is my right, your right and the right of every living being on the planet. Someone once said to me that going vegan is ‘too much hard work’. Going vegan is hard? Try being an animal imprisoned in an intensive farm with no sight of the outside world before being pushed into the slaughterhouse, your last moments full of fear, terror and agonising pain.

When building a comprehensive and holistic CSR Profile, organisations would need to include the following:

- Ensuring activities do not negatively impact the rights of Humans (customers / others);
- Ensuring activities and dietary choices do not negatively impact the rights of Animals;
- Ensuring activities do not conflict with Legal and regulatory requirements;
- Ensuring customers/consumers are listened to, respected and informed;
- Ensuring activities do not include unethical trading and/or investment;
- Making donations to worthwhile causes such as children’s charities;
- Being actively involved in beneficial community or global projects.

As for recognising animals as “interested parties” organisations would be foolish to ignore the elephant in the room for any longer as their customers of tomorrow may be different from those of today. Aside from that, isn’t social responsibility about doing the right thing?

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