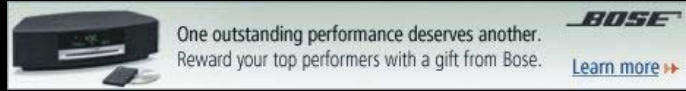


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The Insider



Rewarding Excellence *IMA Grants 1st Social Responsibility Award*

Deborah L. Vence

Corporate social responsibility, or CSR, enhances a company's value in the community, builds brand loyalty, attracts investors, and attracts and motivates talent.

Recently, the Incentive Marketing Association (IMA) awarded its first ever Circle of Excellence Social Responsibility Award to Chicago-based Hinda Incentives, an incentive company that specializes in sales award and employee recognition programs. The Social Responsibility Award is a new addition to the Circle of Excellence Award Program that was launched in 2000.

The Circle of Excellence awards recognize outstanding examples of successful customer and employee incentive programs that are designed to help drive business. Three key areas are considered for the IMA Circle of Excellence Social Responsibility Award. They comprise: Corporate Citizenship, Supply Chain Policies and Industry Leadership. In each area, entries are judged on: level of company commitment; creativity shown in addressing social issues; execution of social responsibility initiatives; extent to which the company communicated and promoted its position on social responsibility to customers, investors, suppliers, employees and communities; and effectiveness of social responsibility efforts.

"From a personal perspective, [the award] is different than a business success reward. This award is something more personal. Corporate social responsibility is part of my upbringing, and to be recognized, for me, has deeper meaning," said Michael Arkes, CEO of Hinda Incentives, who received the award at The Motivation Show in Chicago in October. "I grew up on the south side of Chicago. I was a baby boomer that went through the Vietnam protest period. It's a part of my core, and what I do as an adult is an extension of that upbringing. It's ingrained in me."

Arkes began his mission in corporate social responsibility as a volunteer with The Enterprising Kitchen (TEK), a Chicago-based nonprofit social enterprise that manufactures soap and spa products and is dedicated to helping lower-income women build a foundation for permanent employment. During their six-month paid transitional employment in The Enterprising Kitchen, women learn critical life and job skills and receive personalized training and support services. The women are referred directly from social service agencies, lack employment experience, have a history of drug or alcohol addictions, have been incarcerated, have limited education or are refugees. On average, participants live in deep poverty, earning average income at rates less than half the federal poverty level.

"Basically, they have severe barriers to employment. They're not the first person a company would hire. There's training in how to deal with conflict, how to interview for a job. And at the end of the program, the organization helps place them in permanent employment," Arkes explained. "Ten women who graduated from the program [recently], nine out of 10 landed a job. Being placed in jobs is miraculous in this economy. It's truly a miracle."

In 2003, Arkes founded Helping Hand Rewards, which serves as a conduit and a catalyst between social purpose businesses that produce merchandise and incentive companies; and provides marketing, business development and distribution expertise to socially-focused organizations that are interested in expanding their business into the incentive reward and recognition market. The goal of Helping Hand Rewards is to help social enterprises gain entry into the \$46 billion dollar incentive industry.

TEK was the first social enterprise Arkes worked with. After Helping Hand Rewards was launched, Arkes sought additional social enterprises that were not pursuing the incentive, recognition, business gift or promotional products markets. Currently, Helping Hand Rewards works with: The Enterprising Kitchen, Greyston Bakery, Bright Endeavors, Lambs Farm, Mary Fisher, Mercado Global, Nikaya Handcrafted, Women Helping Other Women and Women's Bean Project.

"What I do is I help [social enterprises] develop the programs that enable them to interface with incentive companies or corporations," he said. "I teach them how to do the business. I communicate and help market products to the incentive market."



And CSR is proving to be important to corporations.

That is, 90 percent of senior executives believe that CSR has a "fundamental" or "quite important" impact on corporate reputation; while 96 percent of those executives believe CSR has a "fundamental" or "quite important" role to play in generating value added, which was revealed in Arkes' presentation, titled, "Corporate social responsibility... Doing good for others can be good for business," at The Motivation Show. (The data was taken from a 2008 IBM Global Corporate Social Responsibility Survey.)

Meanwhile, Arkes' "thank you" speech—as the recipient of the Circle of Excellence Social Responsibility Award—highlighted the story of a woman named Heather Catlin. The young mother left an abusive husband and moved into a shelter for domestic violence victims in rural North Carolina with her young daughter.

"Fortunate for Heather," Arkes said in his speech, "a group of women started a bakery to offer transitional employment to women like Heather. The leader of that social enterprise, (Matilda James) also provided Heather support and direction. She helped Heather regain the self-confidence she needed to meet life's challenges. Heather transitioned from Women Helping Other Women to a full-time job at a local grocery store. Today, after multiple promotions, Heather is an assistant store manager for that grocery chain. She is proud of what she has accomplished and proud of the example she is providing her daughter."

Arkes said his goal is for products from social enterprises to total at least one-fifth of 1 percent of the total sales for resellers in the incentive and recognition markets.

"If we estimate that all resellers in total sell \$1 billion, then this would represent \$2 million in sales," he said. "Compare that to the modest amount of sales it takes to support the participants in programs at social enterprises and you can appreciate the profound impact our industry could have."




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