Doing Well by Doing Good — How Purpose-Driven Entrepreneurs Are Changing the World



Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

Philanthropy is more than just writing a check; it's about creating a lasting impact by serving others. For entrepreneurs, integrating social good into the fabric of a business isn't just noble — it's a powerful way to build a sustainable company that resonates with employees, customers and communities alike.

During a conversation with Cheryl Sutterfield-Jones, CEO of Cars for Kids in Texas, I was struck by her insights on how leaders can make a difference beyond profit margins. Her

stories offered valuable lessons on embedding purpose into business strategies, fostering trust and making an impact that transcends traditional business goals.

Related: 5 Entrepreneurial Reasons to Embrace Philanthropy

Founders who built purpose into their businesses

Purpose-driven entrepreneurship isn't a new concept. Several founders have woven philanthropy into their companies from the start:

- **Blake Mycoskie (TOMS):** Mycoskie pioneered the one-for-one giving model, donating a pair of shoes for every pair sold.
- **Patagonia's Yvon Chouinard:** Chouinard built Patagonia with environmental stewardship at its core, donating 1% of sales to environmental causes.
- **Dan Price (Gravity Payments):** Price made headlines by raising his employees' minimum salary to $70,000 while cutting his own pay.
- **Scott Harrison (charity: water):** Harrison founded charity: water to provide clean water access worldwide, with a model of complete donation transparency.

These founders didn't just focus on building successful companies — they made giving back a core part of their missions. Their stories show that doing good can be deeply integrated into business operations.

The power of servant leadership in

business

Cheryl's journey into servant leadership began early in her career. "I knew I wanted to help others when I was a young girl," she shared. "While attending a conference, I was introduced to Robert Greenleaf's philosophy of the Servant as a Leader. I realized my personal goals of listening, humility, coaching, empathy and empowering my teams aligned with servant leadership."

This philosophy isn't just relevant to nonprofits or large organizations; it holds significant value for entrepreneurs starting new ventures. Founders often wear multiple hats and face immense pressure to deliver results. By adopting a servant leadership mindset, they can create a culture of trust, collaboration and empowerment from day one.

Related: Why Being a Servant Leader Is Essential for Your Business's Long-Term Growth

Personal stories of impact

One of the most powerful stories Cheryl shared was about leading through a crisis. During the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, her teams were working around the clock to provide support. Recognizing the personal sacrifices her employees were making, she took the time to write personal thank-you letters to their families.

"One team member didn't have a local family, so her letter was addressed to her cats with some cat treats," Cheryl shared with a smile. "Although it has been 20 years, I still hear from team members and even some of their family members about how that gesture made a difference."

Cars for Kids itself is a powerful example of how purpose can drive business success. The organization takes vehicle donations and uses the proceeds to fund education for at-risk

youth at Texans Can Academies. This model of turning unused assets into life-changing opportunities for students shows how businesses can leverage philanthropy for long-term impact.

Balancing purpose with business goals

One challenge entrepreneurs face is balancing purpose with profitability. The misconception that doing good comes at the expense of business success is outdated. In reality, businesses that prioritize social good often see better employee retention, customer loyalty and brand reputation.

“Servant leadership strengthens employees’ dedication to the organization and their commitment to excellence,” Cheryl explained. “When the team is included in the decision-making process, empowered to do their jobs and their personal and professional growth is encouraged, you have a highly motivated team performing at peak level.”

For founders, this means that embedding purpose into your business model can create a competitive advantage. Customers are increasingly choosing brands that align with their values, and employees want to work for companies that make a positive impact. Purpose-driven companies aren’t just surviving — they’re thriving.

Practical tips for purpose-driven entrepreneurs

If you’re an entrepreneur looking to integrate social good into your business, consider the following steps:

- **Identify your cause:** Choose a cause that resonates with you and your brand. Whether it’s education, environmental sustainability or social equity, aligning

your business with a purpose makes your mission more authentic.

- **Build purpose into your business model:** Think beyond donations. How can your product or service directly impact your cause? Consider models like one-for-one giving, sustainable sourcing or inclusive hiring practices.
- **Empower your team:** A purpose-driven mission starts with your employees. Foster a culture where team members feel empowered to contribute to your mission. Encourage them to share ideas on how the company can give back.
- **Be transparent:** Customers want to know where their money is going. Share your impact stories through blogs, newsletters or social media. Transparency builds trust and loyalty.
- **Adapt and evolve:** As your business grows, so will your opportunities to make an impact. Stay open to evolving your mission and expanding your social initiatives.

Personal reflection: Why purpose matters in entrepreneurship

In my own journey as a business leader, I've seen firsthand the power of integrating purpose into business. It's not just about profitability; it's about building something that lasts – something that makes a difference.

One of my most memorable experiences involved mentoring young entrepreneurs. Seeing their growth and success reinforced my belief that giving back is not just a moral obligation but a strategic advantage. It builds stronger communities, fosters loyalty and creates a sense of purpose that drives both personal and professional fulfillment.

Related: **4 Steps to Building a Purpose-Driven Business**

A call to action for aspiring entrepreneurs

As we reflect on the lessons from Cheryl Sutterfield-Jones and other purpose-driven founders, it’s clear that leadership and philanthropy can go hand in hand. Whether you’re a new entrepreneur or a seasoned founder, consider how you can make a difference through your business.

Identify your purpose, embed it into your operations, and lead with empathy and transparency. Your business can be more than a source of profit — it can be a vehicle for positive change. The payoff? A thriving company, a motivated team and a legacy that lasts.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/leadership/how-purpose-driven-entrepreneurs-are-changing-the-world/485380