How to Implement a Corporate Social Responsibility Program With a Lasting Impact

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As a founder and CEO, I've always believed that good health for individuals, communities and companies starts from the ground up, quite literally. And with my company, ZenToes, it's always been my priority to ensure that our mission comes to life, not simply through our effective, podiatrist-recommended foot care solutions, but also through our proactive work as an organization to make active living accessible to everyone.

Implementing a Corporate Social Responsibility program is a great way to bring a mission to life in a way that demonstrates real progress and impact, and it was a path that I, as a business leader, was keen to explore.

The process of identifying, defining and enacting a CSR program is a unifying one for any organization — best done by involving the entire team in collectively outlining the company's values, objectives and best path to give back in support of the people and communities you seek to serve.

After lengthy team conversations, we launched ZenToes' *Strides for Wellbeing* initiative last year. The program aims to increase accessibility to physical activities by offering scholarships and sponsorships for local running and walking events, and removing financial barriers to participation.

Overall, the CSR program's benefits have been invaluable, extending from individuals and communities around the country

to our own team and reinforcing everyone's commitment to the important work we do each day.

In this article, I'll share practical insights on how other CEOs and business leaders can launch and sustain CSR programs with real, lasting impact – programs that not only support your company's values but also make a tangible difference in the communities you reach.

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1. Align your CSR program with your core mission

It's always important to think big picture in terms of how any program connects with your brand and mission, particularly when it comes to Corporate Social Responsibility. Have a clear understanding of how you define your mission, and then use that as the foundation to build a CSR program that creates real impact towards that goal.

With *Strides for Wellbeing* for instance, ZenToes is able to make a clear difference in sponsoring physical activity through marathon, half-marathon and walking event scholarships – ultimately, making movement more accessible and ensuring that finances are not a barrier to entry for those looking to get the most out of their life in motion.

2. Create clear and measurable objectives

With any CSR program, be sure to set clear and measurable objectives so that you're able to track long-term impact and overall program success. You could work towards a set number of communities served, dollars donated, or, in our case, steps achieved.

Be transparent about the impact you're making. It'll build trust not just with future partners, but with your community and team, as well.

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3. Involve employees in the process

In the lead up to outlining and launching any CSR program, be sure to involve your team, ensuring that your entire organization feels personally connected to the initiative.

I found it helpful to hold regular full-team meetings in order to poll all employees and determine what initiatives and causes everyone felt most strongly we should support. You, of course, want to stay true to your values as an organization and find something that is aligned with your overall offering.

4. Partner with aligned organizations

Working with organizations and individuals that believe in your mission and want to extend your support to their community is one of the most rewarding parts of any CSR program. It's through genuine collaboration that you're able to make the most difference in people's lives, amplify their stories, and extend similar opportunities to other members of their communities. Not every organization is automatically the right fit.

5. Commit to long-term sustainability

CSR should not be a one-off project. Rather, it should be sustainable and integrated into the fabric of your company

culture. In ZenToes' case, we're establishing ongoing, long-term partnerships with race organizers across the country to continue to increase our impact year-over-year. Make your CSR goals part of how you measure your success annually, and engrain giving back in our company identity.

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6. Communicate results and celebrate successes

Transparency is key to not just demonstrating the impact of your program but also building trust. Regularly share updates on your CSR efforts through internal team updates, newsletters, and social media campaigns. Both digital and in-person channels offer great opportunities to increase visibility and amplify your program's success.

In our case, we even go beyond the numbers to share the stories of individuals who've benefited from our scholarships, highlighting the impact our program has had on individuals and their local communities.

By following these tips, CEOs and business leaders can launch CSR programs that go beyond surface-level engagement and genuinely create positive change, all while aligning with their company's broader mission and values.

Whether you're a small startup or a growing enterprise, a thoughtful, well-executed CSR program can foster stronger connections with your community and set the stage for sustainable business success.

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