

Considerations like these are particularly relevant today. The corporate organization which I represent has made a very strong commitment to culture in this country, to the arts, and the support of a multitude of community and charitable projects. But we know that not all of the cultural institutions or other philanthropically based institutions in this country can survive. We are not certain, nor can anyone be, that they all should.

We do know, however, that the social and economic infrastructure of this country will not be sustained, or made healthier by our support of organizations that are limping along without addressing the basic issues which are central to their survival and their social mission.

These are difficult times and many organizations are under pressure. This is as true of those who receive charitable funds as it is of those who are trying to generate the profits which produce those charitable funds. But we must persevere in spite of our present difficulties.

I am confident that through continuing consultation and co-operation between grantors and recipients, through a consistent reappraisal by socially responsible corporations of their donations criteria and programs, corporations can continue to assist in the process of making this country a better place for more people.

Assisting and Working with Social Service Agencies in Difficult Times: The Role of the Private Sector*

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As background to this article readers should understand that what I have to say is essentially restricted to the policy and practices of Imasco and to my 10 years' experience as Chairman of the company's Corporate Donations Committee. The Committee reports to the Executive Committee and the Board of Directors of Imasco. It should also be stated that it is our belief that corporate donations are more justifiable than ever during hard times and that they should be more numerous and larger during economic difficulties, rather than, as is often the case, fewer and smaller.

The following facts should also be of interest:

a) Imasco's annual donations budget is related directly to its business success—the greater our profits, the greater the amount available to the Donations Committee. This budget excludes financial support given to marketing programs such as Imperial Tobacco's sports and cultural sponsorships or the Shoppers Drug Mart/Pharmaprix sponsorship of junior sports events. At the present time the corporate

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donations budget is in the million-dollar bracket with more than 60 per cent locked into annual donations (including annual increases) to higher education, welfare and health campaigns.

b) The Donations Committee is made up of representatives from the head-office staff functions of finance, public affairs and secretarial as well as individuals from three of our four operating divisions—tobacco, retailing and food processing. (Our United States restaurant division operates separately.) This structure has helped the committee immeasurably in its assessment of regional appeals.

c) Personally I see a responsible company's giving as the corporate interpretation of the Golden Rule and a reflection of its commitment to a democratic political system and a market economy.

My discussion of the private sector's role in assisting and working with social service agencies in difficult times arises from this background.

It is no great revelation to state that the things a company like Imasco can give are:

- money
- the equivalent of money (through gifts-in-kind)
- people's time and specialized skills.

Deciding where to place the emphasis among these three alternatives in difficult times offers grantors and social service agencies an opportunity to demonstrate creativity and imagination.

What are some of the social elements which the economic recession has spawned? For one thing, the recession has created a new class, the "new poor". These are laid off blue-collar workers, middle managers and professionals. For another, the recession and concurrent consumer frugality—frugality which finds expression in garage sales, bartering of skills, recycling and personal saving—has made us appreciate older Canadians whose survival skills, learned during the Depression and World War II, are once again applicable. Thirdly, the whole field of health care is under severe pressure because of government cutbacks. As a result, attention is being directed to preventive medicine, home care, nursing homes and community health clinics in an attempt to maintain the ideals behind a universal health-care system while lowering the cost.

There have been changes in the field of social services too. For example, let us look at day care centres. Skyrocketing government social service budgets are outpacing current tax resources with consequent pressure on corporations to sponsor their own day care facilities.

In all of these instances government is referring increased demands for service to the private sector. Yet these increased demands come at a time when the private sector is still plagued with low- or no-profit pictures, layoffs, bankruptcies and a long road still ahead to complete recovery.

It is not an encouraging picture but I believe it offers an opportunity to improve the private sector's role in its relationship with, and as a grantor to, social service agencies.

Two areas in which improvement can occur are immediately apparent:

- 1) An increase in donations in cash and in kind to agencies; and
- 2) An increase in donations of gifts-in-kind—the sharing of specialized skills with agencies.

Action at the first level obviously can only be taken by those companies like Imasco which continue to make reasonable profits. For example, in our operating division the opportunities for providing assistance-in-kind through gifts of processed food or rock-bottom medical prescription services are widespread. Opportunities like this should be explored by all agencies.

The second area, the sharing of experienced people and skills, is one which I believe merits much more attention than it has received in the past. I have never been turned down when, on behalf of Imasco's Donations Committee, I have asked an employee to take an active role in a social agency with which the committee has been involved. Nor has our committee ever failed to support an employee who is already an active volunteer in a good social cause.

Company pensioners are an excellent source of public spirited volunteers. For the past 10 years Centraide (Montreal's United Appeal) has had a former company cashier handling its cash returns during the annual campaign. His salary is paid by Imperial Tobacco during the period he works for Centraide. It is a way of helping Centraide with a specialized skill and adding to the income of a retired member of the Imperial Tobacco family—a sort of subsidized voluntarism which has an important place in our support of social agencies.

Summing up, it is my belief that in difficult times corporate grantors must increase their support of social agencies in cash and in kind. Corporations must also explore, with agencies, imaginative ways of exploiting the goodwill and volunteer potential of employees and pensioners.