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CSR FOR HR or HR FOR CSR- a Win Win For Everybody

Reading **CSR FOR HR** by Elaine Cohen has successfully answered some key questions that have I been chewing over in my head. The book follows the very engaging format of a fictionalized character, Sharon an HR executive, guided by another fictional character named Arena, who initiates her into the world of CSR. As the main character meets and learns from other CSR practitioners, that serve as her teachers and guides, the various functions of CSR within corporate organizations, she also learns what role and responsibility HR can take in changing corporate culture by integrating a CSR perspective into all of its functions.



As though I was initiated too, this book was an eye opener for me to view what I have considered to be primarily HR functions as a form of Social Responsibility. Some of the traditional HR responsibilities this book addresses include: responsible workplace, work life balance, employee development and engagement ,employee rights and diversity, rewards and recognition, health and safety, recruitment and retention, training and development, corporate culture, values and ethics.

Having worked as an organizational development consultant, facilitator and trainer I have seen how the role of corporate culture change often falls on the shoulders of HR. Now CSR practitioners are also change agents banging on the doors of the traditional corporate mindset to become more aware of their responsibility to bring about the kind of social benefits that affect their companies, the employees, and now the world. An alliance of these two change agencies may be just the line of attack to bring down the some of the barriers to change that many companies still hold up.

Elaine makes a strong argument in this book for tying these HR objectives with CSR objectives. In her first sentence in the Introduction she says: “This book is about a wake-up call for the human resources HR profession and a toolkit written to help members of the profession to act.” And while “the intended audience is anyone practising, teaching, learning, aspiring to be in the HR function”, I see value in expanded the audience to include anyone practicing, or aspiring to be in the CSR function as well.

Sometimes when I participate in a gathering that brings together CSR, Community Relations, Corporate Volunteering and Corporate Philanthropy folks, where the discussion centers around employee programs, I wonder: “where is HR?”. For although, stuck in thinking about its traditional roles, HR may be not only unaware of the potential of partnering with CSR, as yet CSR endeavors in organizations sometimes seems dissociated from the HR department. For example, Just look at the [list of CSR and Corporate Citizenship titles](#) of the attendees at [BCCCC’s annual conference](#), where only one HR position had been named amidst the dozens of CSR domain positions.

Or, as another example, a terrific study, which we reported [here](#) before, by Manulife a Canadian-based financial services company operating in 22 countries and territories worldwide, carried out by the community relations department, reported the many benefits of their employee volunteer program to the company in hiring, retention and employee satisfaction, normally areas that are the purvey of HR. This would have, could have, should have, been big news for the HR department too-hopefully it was.

Thankfully, this book helps bring this issue to the forefront. My favorite chapter, Employee Volunteering in the Community, co-written by Elaine Cohen, Chris Jarvis and Angel Parker of [Realized Worth](#) (two of my favorite CSR people) addresses employee volunteering within the rightful context of HR concerns such as employee job satisfaction, recruitment, employee career development, team building and leadership training. Elaine Cohen makes a strong argument for the integration of these domains, as doing so would create value for the companies and the employees as well. HR’s partnership with corporate philanthropy and employee volunteer programs makes a lot of sense. Why duplicate the allocation of resources to address employee satisfaction, training, and employee relations, when these types of community volunteer programs are of benefit not only those causes that they serve but to the entire company as well?

Yes, Elaine Cook's book is a must read for anyone in HR function of any sized organization, and let's not forget for CSR practitioners too. For much more great stuff from Elaine about CSR and HR check out her blog: [csr-reporting](#).

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