

Plenary Presentation



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Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen.

First of all, I would like to extend my warm congratulations to the Hong Kong Institute of Volunteers on their inauguration. This is a very welcome development for Hong Kong, because volunteerism has grown quite significantly although our experience is not as long as in Australia or in the UK since Hong Kong has a much shorter history. It is certainly getting more and more prevalent.

The idea of a productive partnership between the private sector and volunteer- involving organizations is certainly taking shape and growing quite fast in Hong Kong, although I have to say that, for the time being, of course we are probably still very much in the so-called service mode that Ms Margaret Bell talked about. Our two overseas speakers have given us guidelines to new areas of future development that certainly appear to be very exciting, and that should make a difference to the future of Hong Kong as we develop down those lines.

Today I would like to share with you a few personal thoughts and experiences as a member of the private sector. Of course, when we talk about the private sector, basically we are talking about business enterprises, for which making a profit is their rationale. This is of course totally proper and legitimate. But increasingly it is being recognized in society that making a profit is no longer the be-all and end-all of running businesses. There is an increasing focus on corporate social responsibility, increasing expectations that business enterprises have a role to play in contributing to the society in which they operate and in

which they derive their profit. And corporate social responsibility is not just about making profit in a legitimate way, but also making profit in an ethical manner, and increasingly also about giving back to the community, about making the community a better place for all. In this context, I believe private enterprise has an important role to play in supporting and promoting volunteerism. Actually they stand to gain significant benefits from doing so.

Essentially, and again in the traditional sense, there are two forms of support that business enterprises can give to VIOs (Volunteer-involving Organizations) - by means of direct or indirect financial support to service agencies that involve volunteers. This can be in kind or in cash.

Another way is to support and provide volunteers to give their time and effort to help VIOs in delivering their services. Both are effective means of exercising corporate social responsibility. In fact, business enterprises do stand to gain considerable benefits from doing so. Dr Davis-Smith did allude to some of these benefits. I can say from my experience that they can be very real and significant. Of course, being recognized as a caring enterprise or a good corporate social citizen will bring to the organization the benefit of social recognition and improve the corporate image. It would add value to the brand equity of the enterprise itself and of the goods and services that it provides. But encouraging and mobilizing one's employees to participate in voluntary service is a good way not just of enhancing corporate image and so on but actually of building employees' engagement and building team spirit, a sense of identity between employees and the enterprise. And also by encouraging employees to participate in voluntary service is a good way of staff development and training, helping them to acquire new skills and compare new experiences. And, through the service they provide, they can even learn to become good citizens themselves as individuals, to become more caring and more aware of the needs of society, the needs of people who are less fortunate than themselves. All these could translate back into a better service attitude which will bring benefit to the enterprise itself. As people become more caring and more aware, they become better customer service people themselves, and they become better in what they do.

Also, by encouraging one's employees to provide voluntary service, the enterprise can align corporate and employee goals. Particularly, for example, an enterprise can couple the works that it does with encouraging volunteerism among its staff to support its own corporate philanthropy programmes. For some companies, they may choose to focus their corporate philanthropy on a particular area, say services to the elderly or services to the handicapped, and if they mobilize their employees to provide voluntary services to the same sectors and

**Hong Kong Institute of Volunteers
Inauguration Ceremony**
cum
Forum on Building Impact in Volunteering
2013.3.21

even to the same agencies the corporation itself supports, this will be a very good means of building understanding, rapport and a sense of common identity between the employer and the employees.

I would like to share with you another experience that corporations can do. This not just in relation to their own employees; it can also apply to other stakeholders. In my own experience, when I was the Managing Director of Kowloon Motor Bus, we started a passenger organization called "Friends of KMB". It was initially conceived as, in fact, a volunteer corps, for the company itself. These would be passengers who take our buses on a daily basis. We recruited volunteers to help us provide better service by helping the bus captains. For example, if they noticed any service deficiency, anything damaged, or they see rubbish on the floor they would tell the bus captains or they would do something about it themselves. Or if they see other passengers not following the rules strictly, like putting their feet up on the seats in front, then they would, in a nice way, persuade fellow passengers that this is not right thing to do and so on.

After a few years, it branched out and developed into a bigger body and it began to serve as a volunteer corps for other service providing agencies. "Friends of KMB" now have over 3,600 members. For the last ten years, the members collectively have provided more than 10,000 hours of voluntary service a year, such as visiting homes for the elderly, organizing visits to Hong Kong for Aids-affected children from China and things like that, and they have become a significant force in the volunteer sector. I think JP will remember.

They have brought a great deal of goodwill to the company, and I think it is certainly a very beneficial spin off. I am sure that without the "Friends of KMB", our latest fare increase would have met with even greater criticism that it has. Anyway, these are just a few thoughts and experiences I would like to share with the audience today. Thank you!