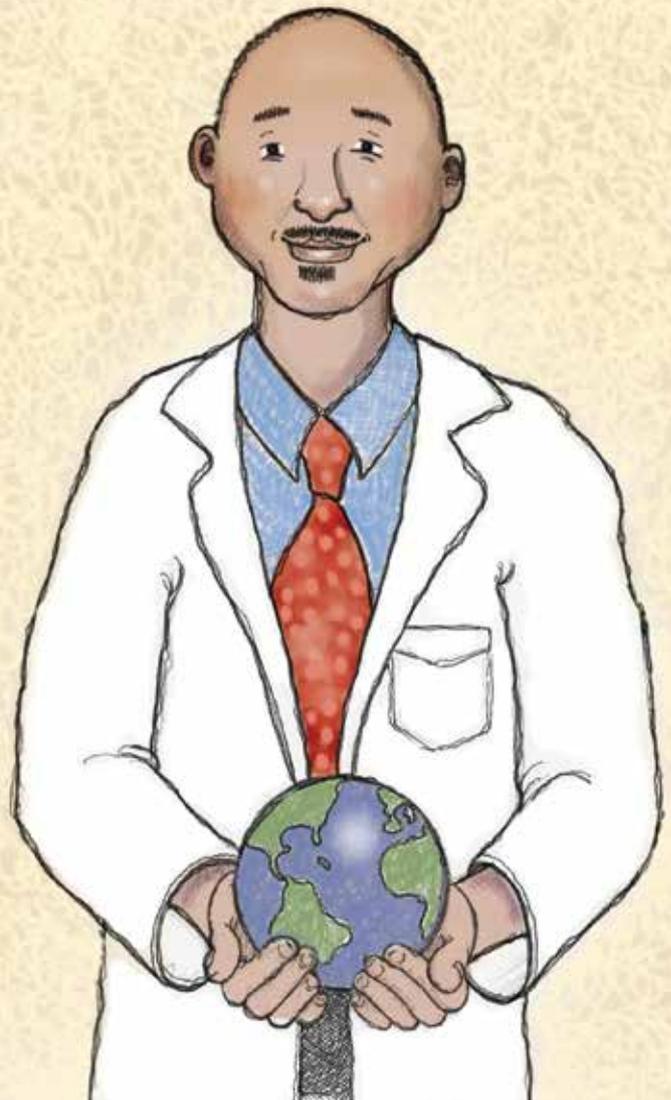


Good Vibrations and Excitations

Considering Social Responsibility in Your Practice

By Erica Hansen



In the competitive and increasingly transparent market we face today, we continually ask ourselves: What is the key to winning over our patients and maintaining their loyalty? We have heard everything from a hearing aid battery loyalty program to a captivating front-office experience. These are certainly important, but according to a reoccurring topic in current news, there is one important thing that may help to seal the deal.

Social responsibility—when people and organizations behave ethically and sensitively toward social, cultural, economic, and environmental—is on the rise for businesses both big and small. According to

businessdictionary.com, social responsibility is “the obligation of an organization’s management towards the welfare and interests of the society in which it operates.”

The ease at which news can spread with social media and other technologies makes the viewing of natural, political, and corporate disasters a regular occurrence. Boycotts of those corporations viewed responsible, i.e., a gas company being targeted during an oil spill or a fast-food company being held responsible for obesity, have certainly shown that poor business image translates into lost profitability. Dr. Thomas Ngniatedema,

a business professor at Kettering University in Flint, Michigan, found “a relationship between environmentally conscious corporate operations and financial performance” exists among the top 500 publicly traded companies in the United States. (Ngniatedema, 2014)

As a result, the emerging trend indicates that today’s generation is looking for more than just a good product or service. For example, in a survey by the branding company Landor Associates, 55 percent of consumers said they paid attention to social responsibility when making purchases (Knowledge, 2012). Upcoming generations may be even

more inclined, with 85 percent of youth claiming they pay attention to corporate behavior and 50 percent saying they make purchasing decisions based on social responsibility (Kielburger, 2011).

Both local and global businesses with reputations for being socially responsible are often spotlighted in the news, such as Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream, which, starting as a small independent business, donated 7.5 percent of annual profits to local community projects in the 1990s. (Dembosky, 2010) The rankings of the most socially responsible corporations are published each year.

Give-back models are also evident in audiology. Most of the largest hearing aid companies have charitable foundations. Independent practitioners can join community-service models, such as Entheos Audiology Cooperative (www.entheoshearing.com), that guide the inclusion of humanitarian efforts into practices.

What can you do to incorporate the good vibrations of social responsibility into your practice?

Keep a Focused Approach

Whether volunteering as a company for important causes, sponsoring an event, encouraging carpooling to work, having bike parking, going paperless, implementing battery recycling, using non-toxic disinfectant agents, or choosing manufacturers with less packaging, consider concentrating on efforts that naturally align with the mission statement of your practice to keep a focused approach.

Get Employees on Board

Before reaching out to the broader community, it is important to get employees on board with new visions first. Implementing a socially responsible vision is a great way to bring your organization together toward common good and encourage employees to feel good about their job.

Do It For You

While the rewards of social responsibility could be great for business (i.e., free publicity, increased patient loyalty, etc.), do it for yourself and not because of what others will think. Morality shouldn't need incentive to do the right thing or to offset a "bad" act. In addition, it will likely help increase enthusiasm for what you are doing, prevent burnout, and help you sleep better at night.

Conclusion

No matter how big or small your business, socially responsible initiatives can help you do more with less. There are many facets for audiologists to contribute to social, cultural, economic, and environmental issues. Working toward greater good is a way to bring teams together. Patients will likely take notice of your organization for being socially responsible, and reward these practices with praise, loyalty, and their valued business. 🎧

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Illustration by Johanna van der Sterre.

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