

Give to Grow

Charles Antis, Founder and CEO and Susan DeGrassi, Director of Cause, Antis Roofing & Waterproofing, Irvine, CA

In a healthy organization, should purpose come before profit? For some, this priority has served very well.

Can your organization be led by a mission to achieve social, community or environmental benefit – to do well by doing good? Leaders in businesses that have an intentional focus on purpose find their perspective shifting to embrace “profit for a purpose.”

Charles Antis, Founder and CEO of Antis Roofing, Irvine, CA is fueled by a desire to be not just an expert in his field of roofing and waterproofing, but to also be a leader in his community that models how to use success, resources, time and influence to change the world – in his case, one roof at a time. Antis’ story began at the start of his company, when every piece of business was necessary to pay the bills and support his own young family. He met a mother and her seven children, living in a mildew- and mold-infested home, desperate for a roof repair but with no ability to pay. With conflicting emotions, he knew he couldn’t walk away. He found six volunteers from his church and that weekend, they put on a crude, but watertight roof. That was the start of a life-long practice: to give back first.

Whether your business is roofing or electrical, computer systems or architectural services, the same model that works for Antis can be effective for you, too. Some good questions to start with are these:

- How can leaders and their organizations assess their ability to give back to their communities?
- What is the best way to build a culture that cares within your own organization?
- What is the right balance between running a business, integrating cause marketing, and maintaining a strong, respected brand?

Starting your give-back program could be as simple

as donating materials or a service from your company expertise or inventory. In our case, it was a roof repair to a local non-profit, and then share that experience with your colleagues in the industry. Encourage other trades to give back their expertise as an “in-kind” gift. It is simple, leverages what you are already doing every day, and involves your employees. For Antis, it all began with a donation of a roof installation to Habitat for Humanity in Orange County. Soon one became another, and in 2009 Antis became the primary donor for all roof installations, with Eagle Roofing Products donating the roofing materials, and continues the program to this day. “We’re proud of that of course,” says Charles Antis, CEO and founder of Antis Roofing & Waterproofing. “But we wanted to do more, and so when a non-profit organization calls with a leak in their building, we send a couple of our guys out



to get them dry. It's not a big spend, and it expanded our reach to now more than 40 non-profit organizations in the community."

Susan DeGrassi, Antis' Director of Cause advises, "There is likely an individual in your organization who has the passion to help others. Identify that leader and collect a few interested cross-department employees to discuss how your company can do good in your community."

- Decide on an area of impact for your giving and then decide how the company will support non-profits that align with your focus (time, money, and resources). Shelter is an obvious impact area for a roofing company – there are numerous non-profits focused on providing housing, respite care, emergency shelters and more. Your impact area ideally should match the business you are in, in some way, to leverage cause marketing practices.

Workforce Development is another impact area ideal for a roofing company. Start by offering a few summer youth internships and as the commitment evolves, consider partnership with a non-profit that focuses on getting young adults in the workplace for permanent positions. DeGrassi shares, "There is a labor shortage in construction across the country. Finding non-profit partners that work with high schoolers and young adults post high school, and veterans, in the communities where we are doing business has been easy. It isn't perfect – for many people young in career, developing their technical skills and emotional intelligence skills in the workplace can be a challenge at times. But the successes have outweighed the obstacles, and many of our team members get real hands-on experience with this particular mission as the mentor and project manager for the interns' work."

- Keep it simple – crawl, walk, then run. Don't try to take on too much, do too much, or spend too much in the beginning. Avoid overtaxing your organization.
- A best practice is creating a real impact with one or two non-profits. Ideally, your company can build on donating in-kind services, volunteering, and ultimately, a deeper involvement with financial support and perhaps serving on the board.

Choosing a Non-Profit Requires Some Research

It is common for a non-profit relationship to start because of a personal relationship one of the company leaders has within the organization. Ideally, it is worth the time and effort to research various options starting with – does the non-profit complement your impact focus and cause marketing objectives?

- Visit the non-profit to see if it fits your culture and mission.
- Research the financial practices, stability and reputation of the non-profit. A basic 990 financial report on a non-profit is available at no cost on Guidestar

www.guidestar.org/Home.aspx

- A non-profit that also has volunteer opportunities for your employees can be ideal – especially if it is onsite. Even better, can employees' families participate in the volunteer and fundraising activities?
- Is there a way to integrate your clients and stakeholders in a volunteer event as guests of your company? Habitat for Humanity home builds have been a key partner that Antis has been able to bring to our clients. The build is very meaningful to people. It is not a fundraiser, so there is no expectation of a donation that day. We sponsor the build, provide lunch, and offer some team building activities the day of. In turn, Habitat expands their reach in the community.
- Support the mission of the non-profit you choose in multiple ways: for example, integrate a team event that provides necessary supplies to the organization, attend their fund raisers and volunteer.
- Skilled labor volunteering is often a need. Can the organization share the accountant to help with budgeting? The HR lead to help craft an employee handbook? A contractor to perform general repairs in their building?



A truck to deliver donations to another site?

Create a Plan That Engages Your Team

Companies that excel in corporate social responsibility have strong leadership buy-in and engage employees at all levels. Start by creating a plan that sets your objectives, establishes a few policies and determines "how much" your company will give – in terms of volunteer time, in-kind donations and money. If your company is in multiple regions, perhaps choose a non-profit that is also in multiple regions, or an "impact area" with a local non-profit that fits the definition.

Develop some internal policies that encourage employees to participate. Start with something simple such as 8-16 hours of paid time off annually for volunteer activities. The

company will need to track this for non-exempt employees. Integrate the time-off request into your existing form/process for vacation, sick and personal time, and with payroll to keep track of time used. The company can support any volunteer activity the employee chooses, and/or also create a few opportunities in the community for team events throughout the year.

Creating events that employees can support during regular work hours is a plus. But if it is a weekend event or after hours, then offer volunteer activities that can include other family members. Remember to keep it simple – start with 2-4 activities a year at most and see how it fits your culture and business. Avoid scheduling events during business cycles that are especially busy (budgeting, performance reviews, inclement weather that impacts labor demands.) Most likely there will be a few employees who actively participate and many who do not. Be patient – it takes time to develop this within your company culture.

For Antis, the shift to becoming a “people before profit” company was very visible and very moving. One of the field technicians came to Charles Antis and asked if he would donate materials for a deck repair. This man had met a family on one of the company’s condominium job sites; they were reeling from financial setbacks due to the father having cancer. Their deck needed to be repaired but they had no funds to take care of their property. “Our technician donated his Saturday to provide the labor and of course, the company donated the materials. That moment was huge for me, and for our company,” Antis says.

Your company might consider allocating some funds to support causes important to an employee but not necessarily the company. The donation could be restricted to a 501(c)(3) non-profit and only one for which the employee already volunteers in some way. “One of our office staff approached us to cover the cost of shirts for her March of Dimes walk team for their annual fund raiser. She and her family were long time supporters of the March of Dimes as her nephew had received support from that non-profit after his birth. It meant a great deal to say “yes” to that request” said DeGrassi. Take requests for support on either a first come, first serve basis or have an application process. Tip: Do not over-structure when you start. Keep it simple and allocate up to \$250 per employee per year.



Tell Your Story

Cause marketing is not new – businesses like Coca Cola and Patagonia have been doing it well and inspiring others for many years. Why do we talk about doing good? Because the community needs to hear it. Consumers want to know that the businesses they engage with are more than just a provider of goods and services. They want to know how a business pours its reach, expertise, influence and profits back into the community. Talk about what you are doing. Inspire others. Lift your employees by celebrating their contributions. Let your customers know about a cause important to you. Be authentic, fun and enthusiastic. Put the mission of the organization out in front, and the company’s support alongside that story. The easiest way to talk about your story is through social media, your website, print and electronic newsletter communication. Tell your story with photos and infographics and keep the content crisp and succinct.

Non-profits benefit from the attention because it brings awareness to their cause and provides an opportunity to showcase their mission. Consider collaborating with other vendors and suppliers on a big initiative that requires many volunteers, especially skilled labor, and has a more significant cost. “One of the most memorable events we participated in was at Camp Ronald McDonald for Good Times in Idyllwild, California,” shares Cori Vernam, Marketing Manager. “The camp hosts families who have a child dealing with a devastating illness. On a hot day in August, Antis, Shell Roofing and C.I. Services provided the labor, Beacon Roofing Supply donated the materials, and we worked on the roofs of several of the camp buildings. We had BBQ for lunch and it was truly a bonding

experience, especially for the technicians. It was a great story for the camp, too!"

Charles Antis advises businesses to experiment and have fun with inventing their purpose and culture. "I used to feel inadequate in comparison to the Fortune 100 and 500 companies that were donating millions of dollars with thousands of employee volunteer hours," he says. "In the last year, however, I've had executives who oversee CSR (corporate social responsibility) and cause marketing for these companies tell me that they envy us. Unlike the environments they are working in - large corporate structures, every move judged by the public - we are nimble, can make mistakes and easily correct our course." DeGrassi adds, "Find a group in your community of businesses and their employees that are involved in CSR. We participate at a national level with the US Chamber Corporate Citizenship Foundation and Council www.uschamberfoundation.org, which has been a very meaningful relationship. At the local level in Southern California, OneOC www.oneoc.org/employee-volunteering-solutions/corporate-volunteer-council-of-orange-county is a non-profit that brings businesses and non-profits doing good together and we are very active with this organization - both learning and mentoring. And, of course, we are very willing to share our best practices and lessons learned with anyone who asks!"

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Two more simple but extremely important barriers that will need to be overcome are insurance requirements and local permitting processes. FlaSEIA will be working with local building departments to streamline and simplify solar permitted processes, which can vary significantly in time, cost, and requirements between each of the 67 counties in Florida. Insurance requirements are a tall order without an immediate solution. Given the safety of modern inverter systems, this requirement is redundant and outdated, and can greatly reduce the ROI of solar systems. For example, a tier 2 solar system will be required to have \$1 million in liability insurance.

So, as we can see, there is a ton of good things happening in solar, and a few hurdles that are left to be overcome. The good news is the market is growing every single day and the demand for solar has grown significantly in the past few years. We encourage you to get involved and learn about how you can make positive changes for the solar market in Florida in 2019 and beyond.

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