



The Conscience of Capitalism: Business Social Responsibility to Communities

Terry L. Besser

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The common wisdom that business contributions to the common good are counterproductive in the new competitive global marketplace does not hold up to empirical research. In fact, doing good is good for business, and a majority of businesses do provide some form of community support, which Besser discovered in her exhaustive survey of the Iowa business community. Business owners and managers often act out of a sense of community spirit and a certain obligation to better the common good. While the increasingly globalized economy has encouraged a number of large corporations to become freewheelers, the vast majority of companies are firmly rooted in place and look at their locales with more than just a utilitarian eye.

Extensive interviews with Iowa business owners, managers, and business and community leaders are combined with findings from prior studies of corporate citizenship, and the evidence clearly indicates that the majority of businesses provide some form of community support. Most owners feel they should do more than just make a profit, so they often seek ways to give back to their communities, a move that is usually nurtured within the business community itself. However, corporate altruism carries risks. Many business owners have unwittingly offended customers and clients by their acts of civic spirit. Besser concludes her book by addressing the potential threats to business social responsibility posed by globalization and recommends steps to enhance socially responsible capitalism. Anybody interested in the complex interaction of businesses and the communities they reside in will enjoy reading this positive revisitation of the mutually supportive relationship between trade and polity.

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