
CSR through Students: Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract: Although CSR is abbreviated as the Corporate Social Responsibility but the training for developing competent professionals who are really generous to the deprived and underprivileged sections of the society should be made an integral part of their schooling and their education at the higher levels. Every year these institutions get a fresh lot of students with brimming energy and enthusiasm. If the CSR training is amalgamated intelligently as an important co-curricular activity along with running syllabus and executed effectively, it can really bring a great relief and quality in the lives of countless people living a helpless life. But that does not mean that there are no challenges in conducting CSR activities through students. They are there but can be resolved through patience, experience and proper guidance.

Keywords: CSR, Corporate Social Responsibility, Social Service, Social Welfare, Slum Education, Social awareness

I. INTRODUCTION

CSR is generally understood as a management norm of the companies for achieving the economic, social and environmental balance and simultaneously fulfilling the expectations of the shareholders and stakeholders. ‘CSR Asia’ writes - “CSR is a company’s commitment to operating in an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable manner whilst balancing the interest of diverse stake-holders” whereas the ‘World Business Council’ for Sustainable Development describes CSR as “the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of the workforce and their families as well as the local community and society at large” [1-3].

CSR initiatives by educational institutions thus have multifold benefits although they have inherent real challenges too.

II. CHOOSING SUITABLE AND MANAGEABLE CSR ACTIVITIES

As an Associate Professor and coordinator of the CSR Club of my institute, I found it important to finalize the suitable and manageable CSR activities as the students remain engaged with their academic schedules, assignments, events and expectations. Over involvement in CSR activities could hinder their academic and professional growth and no involvement may result in a dry and hard professional with no mercy at heart. After sufficient number of meetings with the faculty members and students, we finalized two major CSR activities – ‘Parivartan’ – the Slum Education Programme and ‘Utthan’ – an initiative to felicitate the poor meritorious children.

III. STUDENTS’ ROLE IN ‘PARIVARTAN’ AND ‘UTTHAN’

‘Parivartan’ is a comprehensive slum education programme conducted by the student volunteers of ITS, Ghaziabad in which student volunteers visit slums on all Sundays and teach around 100 slum children as per their I.Q. and current knowledge. At the end of the class, biscuits, chocolates and sweets are distributed among all as routine. Slum children and their parents eagerly wait for ITS

volunteers on each Sunday and have turned this CSR initiative into a huge success which has been running for more than seven years. The roles of students in 'Parivartan' include calling other volunteers every Sunday by mail, making a lesson plan for each Sunday activity, purchasing eatables for slum children, teaching and controlling children at the slum, distributing eatables to slum children, clicking pictures, submitting bills and the report of each activity. All expenses are borne by the institute.



Figure. I. Holi Celebration with the Slum Children of Sahibabad, Ghaziabad

'Utthan' is a unique and comprehensive CSR project of ITS, Ghaziabad under which the faculty and student volunteers visit various government schools and shortlist poor but meritorious students studying in class 5, 6 and 7. These students are called to the campus of ITS on all working Saturdays where under the guidance of faculty coordinator, student volunteers impart basic knowledge of English, Science, Maths, History, Computer GK etc. to them. During the break they are given refreshments too. At the end of such classes, certain competitions like Painting Competition, Dance Competition, Singing Competition and games are also organized and First, Second and Third Prize winners are given attractive prizes. We have received overwhelming response and feedback by these students and their parents and is committed to continue this support to these talented buds.

IV. THE CHALLENGES

The challenges are many. If I talk of 'Parivartan' – the Slum Education Programme, the challenges were finding out a slum where no other NGO is already working, calling and attracting slum children through games and activities, managing their crowd while distributing eatables and goodies, ensuring their regular attendance and involvement.

'Utthan' has little different type of challenges which include convincing Principals of various schools for sharing the details and phone numbers of their meritorious children, convincing the parents of the children for sending their wards to ITS on working Saturdays, making phone calls every time to around 150 such children for inviting them to the activity, keeping them interested, taking care that the activity does not clash with other events of the institute, arranging refreshment, prizes and gifts for all the children and their happy and safe departure from the institute every time.



Figure. II. Republic Day Celebration at ITS, Ghaziabad with Utthan Children



Figure. III. Utthan Children working in the Computer Lab of ITS, Ghaziabad



Figure. IV. Parivartan – The Slum Education Programme at Vasundhara, Ghaziabad

V. THE OPPORTUNITIES

Conducting CSR activities is really not easy. Right from inviting volunteers to fruitfully executing the task, it is a long marathon with countless practical hindrances and challenges. If we go out at midnight for distributing blankets in winters, we meet scoundrels who wish to loot all the blankets and run away and we meet cops too who either ask for an NOC or for two blankets as gifts. But if we see the conclusion of all the CSR activities conducted with the volunteering of students, it has manifold benefits.

The students learn organizing events professionally. They learn how to begin, how to move ahead, how to bring in quality in the process and how to make the outcomes and the efforts visible to others.

The students develop a lot of confidence and hone their leadership skills to a great extent. Initially they hitch but by and by as they understand the process and see the developments, their confidence level increases. Then they themselves become the guiding torches who motivate the entrants to become CSR volunteers. They learn to communicate with the lower strata of the society and talking to them in the language and the terms that they understand. They learn preparing lessons plans and reports. They also learn to click meaningful pictures.

Another benefit is evolving the feeling of compassion in student volunteers. When they see the deprived children, interact with them and learn how they live without even basic amenities to survive, they automatically develop affection for them and wish to leave no stone unturned for making their lives livable. Thus, the feeling of compassion developed in the hearts of the volunteers makes them a generous professional in future who not only think of the corporate growth and benefits but also feel concerned for discharging their social responsibilities.

VI. CONCLUSION

On the basis of my understanding of CSR and experience of being the CSR Club Coordinator for last 5 years, I can safely conclude that the training for actual and meaningful CSR should start at the

educational institutes itself so that the concept does not become just a formality but also upgrades the living standards and the life styles of the deprived and the downtrodden sections of the society. Conducting CSR activities definitely has many challenges and hindrances but if the efforts are made with patience and persistence, it brings countless benefits to the institution, the students and everyone else associated with it.

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