

The Editor
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Sir,

Chuggers, Milton Friedman and employee engagement

Could we congratulate Tom Flood, chief executive of volunteering charity BTCV, on his 'In my opinion' piece (MT 30 September 2010) and make three points.

1. It is good to hear that the best charities are becoming evidence-based organisations, in the same way as the best businesses. The BTCV (British Trust for Conservation Volunteers) is clearly a model for 21st century charities: *get involved; see for yourself; bypass the chuggers.*
2. Milton Friedman's thoughts from the 1970s on what he termed 'social responsibility' ('SR') are often quoted but need to be read and seen in context. He rightly saw that misuse of resources by corporate executives to gain short term kudos was "fundamentally subversive". However, he also saw SR as "entirely justified" when used as a "cloak" (in 1970s PR terms we believe) for actions which were a means to an end, such as devoting resources to local communities where this helped with recruitment and employee retention etc. In this case the end was of course the increase in shareholder value through the enhanced long term profitability and sustainability of the corporation.

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3. In our work with investors and companies advising on governance and CSR strategies we are seeing ever increasing and laser-like focus. This is helping to ensure that CSR strategy and implementation programmes support the overall business strategy and add value as a key driver of the long-term health and growth of the business.

For example one of our clients has implemented a charities strategy which has moved them from a scatter approach (“write us a begging letter...”) to a targeted approach. This engages employees with their customers and markets and enhances employee loyalty by using ‘Leap CR’, an employee volunteering platform, to facilitate and encourage employees to engage with the world around them through the work place.

In short: get involved; bypass the chuggers; SR is key to long-term profit and thus to shareholder value and through focused strategies companies are moving to use tools and programmes to deliver SR openly where Milton Friedman saw that corporations needed a ‘cloak’ in the 1970s.

Yours faithfully,

Steve Askins and Janet Sidaway
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