



From Outpost to Powerhouse: North Texas Corporations Feed Millions

It was akin to a sleepy little outpost on the edge of South Dallas which grew into a massive roaring force for good, mobilizing hundreds of thousands of supporters each year who were adamant that “Hunger is unacceptable.”

That’s how I describe my past sixteen years with the [North Texas Food Bank](#) (NTFB), the primary food provider that distributes over 190,000 nutritious meals *daily* to over 200 North Texas pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, after school and senior programs. This nationally-acclaimed and award-winning nonprofit is a force for good, providing 70 million nutritious meals annually through a savvy technology-driven supply chain that sources fresh produce, proteins and grains equivalent to what you place on your plate each day.

Together with powerful CEO leaders – the late Jan Pruitt and now Trisha Cunningham, a stellar Board, and a fearless team and volunteers, over \$110 million was raised in the past three years for operational and capital support. Public support increased by 588% from \$2.6 million in 2004 to \$17.9 million in 2017, and the donor database from 7,000 to nearly 500,000 records.

One of the primary driving forces for this growth in support was the increased involvement of the North Texas business community. Ambitious, passionate and skilled, the external-facing NTFB team provided:

1. Exemplary customer service,
2. Strategic and customized initiatives, and
3. 360-degree corporate partnership opportunities that went beyond a financial gift.

The most effective corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs are those built into a company’s core vision, mission and values. CSR programs can enhance talent recruitment and retention, elevate brand awareness and impact the bottom line. Cause marketing is a subset of CSR that provides mutual benefit to the business and nonprofit. People, especially Millennials and Gen Z, want to use their time and abilities to create sustainable solutions to further good.

The best-of-the-best CSR and cause marketing programs during my NTFB years possessed these six operating principles:

1. **It’s in our DNA; leadership goes both ways.** Capital One and Rent-A-Center each built a model program that grew into a powerhouse over ten years, donating over \$100,000 annually to NTFB. A \$50,000 matching challenge from Rent-A-Center [leadership](#) mobilized employees of all levels to raise \$50,000 within a month. And raise

it they did. Many other North Texas companies have built into their DNA commitments to the greater good - Alliance Data, Central Market, Frost Bank, Hillwood, Neiman-Marcus, The Ritz-Carlton Dallas, Stephan Pyles, Tom Thumb and Toyota, to name a few.

- 2. Share simple impact stories.** Collect and share succinct, compelling messages that inform, educate and mobilize employees, partners and vendors. Include impact statements. Kroger is a master at messaging, from the check-out counters, in-store audio messaging to their own delivery truck wraps. It always made me smile when a massive Kroger tractor trailer would drive by on the highway with a large Food Bank message on its sides. During September, Hunger Action Month across the nation, AT&T would place Food Bank messages in electronic boards in their downtown Dallas headquarters.
- 3. Physical magnets that draw “community.”** Southwest Airlines created a massive pyramid made out of peanut butter jars to showcase their *Spread Out Hunger* campaign. RSW Creative placed a dinner table in a busy shopping mall, complete with table settings and empty plates. Volunteers approached curious shoppers to informally speak about hunger issues.
- 4. Activate social media and earned media.** Partner with the nonprofit so dual and integrated activation can be planned and executed. Include corporate, elected and grassroots leaders to mobilize the message along with associates. A quick glance at the Food Bank’s Twitter and Facebook will show the array of companies, big and small, who convey and activate their support with a simple post - The Dallas Cowboys, Kent Rathbun and Bank of America among others.
- 5. Call to action.** Research indicates that the number one reason a person donates is because they know the impact of their donated dollar. Create a compelling and simple call to action that informs the prospect of the need and impact similar to this tagline: *\$1 feeds 3 hungry kids.*
- 6. Listen to learn.** The best partners were those companies that had done their research on the Food Bank and hunger, and came to listen, learn and then act. They expressed respect for the organization and truly wanted to help move the needle forward. Their agenda was second to the Food Bank’s yet year-after-year their impact on hunger expanded. Kainos Capital’s

Andrew Rosen and his [leadership team](#) exemplify this principle. Inviting, engaging and respectful during our formal presentation, they promised to call us with an answer in two weeks. And, they did. I’ll never forget how I felt listening to Andrew announce the unanimous internal support to contribute a high six-figure gift to the Food Bank. He exemplified the unadulterated pure joy that comes with giving from the heart.

Increasingly, companies of all sizes have found that building social good into their core values and business is a smart and right thing to do. While this can increase the bottom line, the better approach is to build it from the belief that social good is the oxygen from which good business thrives. Engage your associates and leadership, vendors, clients and prospective clients. Create authentic and easily-executable strategies that build upon core messages that are activated organically and corporately, internally and externally.

My father attended one of Mahatma Gandhi's gatherings in India in the 1930s and forever embraced Gandhi's belief that "*the best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service to others.*"

Your leadership can make this happen. Of that I'm certain.

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