

CSR projects a big draw for Gen Y workers

Corporate giving seen helping with branding, reputation

MORE workers here, particularly those from Generation Y, expect their companies to be involved in corporate social responsibility (CSR) projects.

This was the view of National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre chief executive Laurence Lien, who said that more young people these days were inclined to join companies that offer CSR opportunities for them to be involved in.

Mr Lien made these comments as one of the five panellists at a dialogue session yesterday held at the Singapore Management University (SMU).

The event, organised by a group of SMU students to promote CSR efforts in Africa, was held as part of the second Africa-Singapore Business Forum, which began yesterday.

"We always tell companies that corporate giving, or CSR, is good for business. There are a lot of win-win opportunities. It's not just about pure altruism, it benefits companies in many areas too," said Mr Lien, who is also chairman of the Lien Foundation.

"It helps the community because they are going to be your customers in the future. It helps with your branding and reputation. More employees want to see their companies en-



Mr Lien: 'We always tell companies that CSR is good for business'

gaged in the community, and this can build better employee morale," he added.

Another panellist, Standard Chartered Bank (Singapore) chief executive Ray Ferguson said the best way for a company to have a CSR culture would be if it was driven from the top.

He said CSR should be designed in a way that was integral to an organisation's culture and business in order for it to have a positive impact on the staff.

"(If not), the employees won't be supportive and you won't get the level of engagement that makes a difference," he said, adding that CSR had to be aligned with both the leadership's objectives and the company's business models.

Mr Lien chimed in: "It's not just about going to wash windows or painting a building, which has got nothing to do with a compa-

ny's mission or vision. To make CSR sustainable, companies have to look for projects and initiatives that make business sense and aligned to their core businesses and competencies."

Tunde Onitiri, senior country manager at the International Finance Corporation in Singapore, described CSR as a "business imperative".

He said it was a mistake for an employer to think that his business could be successful without actively creating good and regular linkages to the local community.

SMU president Arnoud De Meyer said that there was a "symbiotic relationship" between CSR and a company performing strongly financially.

"I do believe, and there is a lot of research that indicates this, that they go together, and that it's part of simply being a good company. You are doing well financially, but at the same time you build up your corporate reputation and you invest in social performance," he said.

Professor De Meyer added that all his students complete at least 80 hours of community service with a social or civic organisation during their course of study.

"We do this because we want our students to understand what are the possible career opportunities in a non-profit organisation," he said. "We also hope that we can develop qualities in our students, such as confidence, compassion and, in many cases, self-reliance."