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Nonprofits Offered Insight into Corporate Partnerships



Leonard Schlesinger:
Businesses no longer have a choice

November 8, 2012 — Nonprofits are more likely to create successful corporate partnerships if they understand that businesses increasingly will find it in their interest to develop such relationships, based on remarks by Babson College President Leonard Schlesinger at today's inaugural community leadership breakfast hosted by the Foundation for MetroWest.

Schlesinger, who has consulted with nonprofits and businesses on organizational change, told more than 200 business and nonprofit leaders that the millennial generation, those born between 1980 and 2000, want to work for companies that are committed to engaging with and helping their local communities.

"Businesses no longer have a choice about engaging with their communities," as their involvement with local communities will be critical to their ability to attract employees, he said.

Claiming that community engagement is not a side issue for businesses, but a core part of what they do, he suggested that "any company can be a social innovator by leveraging its business strategy.

"Social innovation is about looking at who you are, and doing something about it. It should be as profound as your business strategy and not treated as an afterthought."

Noting that "the power of the market and individual enterprises is an effective substitute for what government used do, but better than government ever could be," Schlesinger said organizations like the **Foundation for MetroWest**, which understand local needs, can serve as a conduit between businesses and nonprofits.

"It's not as hard as you think," he said. "The fundamental rule is not to over think the issue."

Schlesinger suggested that businesses can effectively and quickly develop a program that is appropriate for them – "to try anything, engage in rapid innovation, conduct after action reviews, modify what you're doing, and do it again."

By way of illustration, he cited Boston Beer Co., which decided that it could make a substantial investment in its community by building on its business expertise.

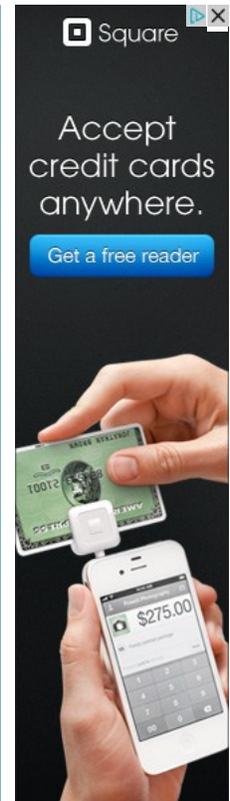
In 2008, the company started a program that provides low and moderate income, food and beverage small business owners that typically employ between one and five people with business mentoring. In launching the program, the company partnered with the domestic arm of Boston-based **ACCION International**, a global microfinance nonprofit. Boston Beer also established a loan fund that makes microloans that range from \$500 to \$25,000.

Judith Salerno, executive director of the Foundation for MetroWest, said the breakfast, held at the Verve Crowne Plaza in Natick, was organized to focus the business community on the needs of the region.

"The business community in MetroWest is one of the strongest in the state, and we wanted to provide a platform for them to collectively engage," she said.

MetroWest is loosely bounded by Routes 128 on the east, Route 495 on the west, Route 2 on the north, and Route 109 on the south.

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