

It's OK for philanthropic motivations to be a little selfish

It probably goes without saying that New Yorkers can be, well, a bit difficult. As a fund-raiser for a NYC-based not-for-profit for many years, I encountered my fair share of these folks, which is one reason why I really looked forward to coming back to my home state of Indiana.



VOICES FROM THE INDUSTRY

Jami Marsh

Having grown up in Indiana, I knew of the kindness and generosity shown to me by neighbors, teachers—even complete strangers—but I'd never lived and worked here as an adult. More importantly, I'd never fund raised here.

In the short time that I've been back, I've found this community to be extremely generous. I can't tell you how many times someone has said to me: "Let me know how I can help you."

Cultural benefits

An important beneficiary of such "Hoosier generosity" is Indianapolis' many arts and cultural institutions and events. After all, philanthropy is the primary reason we are able to enjoy such enormous assets as the Indianapolis Museum of Art, the Children's Museum, the Indianapolis Zoo, the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra and the Indiana Reperto-

ry Theater, to name only a few. For the most part, private gifts built them many years ago and maintain them to this day.

A century ago, Andrew Carnegie said, "It is more difficult to give money away intelligently than it is to earn it in the first place." Being generous today is even more challenging, particularly for corporations, because you can run the risk of offending stockholders and customers who question why you don't use the money to lower costs and reduce prices.

Beyond altruistic

My dozen or so years in philanthropy taught me that both individual and corporate giving need not be purely altruistic if, in the end, both the community and the donor benefits.

I heartily concur with a report by the Council on Foundations that offered this rationale about corporate giving:

"Philanthropic programs are an investment in both the longevity of the business and in the communities in which they operate. This concept is often referred to as 'enlightened self interest'—without healthy communities healthy companies cannot exist. Community involvement is especially critical in today's competitive business environment, where no company can afford to be insular."

Corporate philanthropy has come to be a public expectation. A few years ago, a *Business Week*/Harris Poll found that 95 percent of Americans believe that compa-

nies should be in business for more than profit, that they should give something back to the communities in which they operate.

And more recently, 89 percent said that in the wake of the Enron and WorldCom scandals, it is more important than ever for companies to be socially responsible.

In the recent past, an Indianapolis company—Walker Research—canvassed shareholders and found that 63 percent of investors with a positive view of a company's philanthropy are more likely to continue buying shares in the company. Chairman Frank Walker added, however, that companies can leverage the most goodwill by giving to causes closely associated with their mission.

"So it's appropriate," he said, "for companies such as Avon to support breast cancer research and for LensCrafters to support preventing blindness."

It also provides the rationale for professional sports franchises like the Indiana Pacers and Fever to not only inspire dreams in our youth, but to help them overcome the obstacles in their path in pursuit of those dreams—such as helping struggling students to stay in school or young girls to believe in their potential.

A fun place to live

Supporting arts and culture organizations also contributes immeasurably to the economic growth and development of a community. Very few companies want to

move to or remain in a city where life is dull and boring, where the sidewalks are rolled up at sundown.

The mere presence of the numerous arts and cultural assets that dot the Indianapolis landscape helps give our city a vigor and vitality that make it an attractive destination for both visiting and living. In fact, the presence of these institutions made my transition from New York City—the mecca of arts and culture—back to Indiana that much easier (an office in Conseco Fieldhouse sealed the deal).

I spent one summer in Indianapolis in the early 1990s before I moved to New York. I remember working downtown and not really having a reason to stay downtown after work—there just wasn't as much to do.

I'm sure the city never wants to go back to that situation, and continued corporate and individual philanthropy will help to ensure that our new image is more real than cosmetic.

In his recent remarks at Indiana Black Expo, former Congressman and NAACP President Kweisi Mfume said, "Never underestimate the power and influence of philanthropy."

To which I would add, "And never forget how important it is to our city's future."•

Marsh is executive director of the Pacers Foundation Inc., a not-for-profit arm of the Indiana Pacers. Views expressed here are the writers.