

Creative Consumer Concepts (C3): The Fourth “C” is for Community

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One look at the web site for 2005 Best Bosses Award winner Bob Cutler’s company Creative Consumer Concepts (C3) and you might think the integrated brand marketing agency is all about kids. While on the surface it is, if you dig a little deeper it becomes clear that C3 might have been called C4, with the fourth “C” standing for Community. That’s because when working with his 52 employees, Cutler goes above and beyond to promote and assist their families, their communities, and even the larger world community.

In 2004 Cutler and several other staff members created a unique and extremely beneficial employee benefit: the Global Community Service Program. Open to all employees, the program pays each of them up to 40 hours per year plus travel expenses to provide assistance in other parts of the world. So far employees have made eight trips to countries like Thailand, Ethiopia, Romania, and the Republic of Georgia.

“C3 provides the resources, but the employees make the proposal for what kind of service they want to give and how it will benefit the country or community in the long run,” says Talent Service Specialist Joy Flanigan, who says one such proposal has already been submitted this year. She also notes that C3 will pay employees up to an additional 40 hours per year if they identify a community service need closer to home that they want to fill. For instance, several employees used their in-country time to travel to New Orleans to assist victims of Hurricane Katrina.

Placing employees in situations in which they can be successful is Cutler’s mantra. “It’s more pleasant for people to wake up in the morning and want to come to work,” says Cutler. “So we have a family culture that’s supported by our benefits. We have a responsibility to provide this, and sometimes we need to fight for them.” Some of the other benefits Cutler has worked to advocate include creating three-dimensional welcome signs, or teasers, for an employee’s first day; holding summer parties at a nearby lake; offering half-day Fridays year round; and giving dog owners the ability to bring them to work on Fridays. “And new this year, we have a bulletin board in the hallway where employees can post pictures of their kids and the grades they got at school, things like that,” Cutler says.

Because the industry in which C3 is involved can be “tough and maniacal,” according to Cutler, he says it’s important to be open and honest with his staff. “If someone makes a mistake or has a problem,” says Finance Manager Victoria Davis, “Bob will say to just be honest and let’s move on from here. He has an open door policy and says to people, ‘If you’re not sure who to talk to about something, you can talk to me.’”

Cutler also solicits employee opinions and suggestions for improvement through third-party surveys. “They’re great because they’re affordable and straightforward,” he says. “I had an employee point out that his 401(k) wasn’t being funded quickly enough after each paycheck. He demonstrated that there was anywhere from a three- to a 10-day lag time.

That was something that might not have come to light if not for the survey. I'm glad they're there for that reason."

Besides the atmosphere of open communication and benefits built on the notion of giving back, C3 contains a physical incentive to strive for one's potential: a full-scale rock-climbing wall located in the company's lobby. While Cutler says the wall is not currently used by employees or their families, the tools to figuratively climb the wall have been dispersed among management. These include chalk, rope, and a helmet. "It's a reminder that we work with and hire people who have the attitude to meet the challenges that we face," Cutler says. The persistence to strive for the mountaintop is further reinforced with a cheer that concludes each staff meeting, according to Davis. "Everyone stands and someone calls out 'C3 on three,' and we all count to three and yell 'C3!' It's like a sports team," she says.

"I have a responsibility to put people in situations where they can succeed," says Cutler. "I look to provide value to employees because the client wins, and the company wins, too."

Web site: www.c3.to

Industry: Markets and Promotional Products for the Restaurant Industry

Location: Overland Park, KS

Number of employees: 52

Sales: \$35.9 million



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