

How can businesses help?

By: Veronica Cool May 3, 2015



COOL TIPS

VERONICA
COOL

The city burned.

The fire is banked, yet it simmers.

I choose to focus on this created energy to rebuild, restore and flourish. I want a movement — an Economic Movement.

On Tuesday, April 28, I was in downtown Baltimore, intentionally. I saw prayer circles, peaceful protest, a city seeking to restore and rebuild. Neighbor helping neighbor, including our neighbors throughout the state. businesses calling in, "How can I help?"

Yes, a lot of cleanup is occurring, but we need to incorporate changes that will provide long-term improvement and economic sustainability, to reduce the 29 percent unemployment rate in some of these neighborhoods. To lift folks out of poverty — not a handout, but a hand UP.

We need to disrupt the inherent social issues that are the cause of this situation. We must be invested and committed, sustainably, long-term. No fireworks, no flash support that diminishes within months.

Back to my Economic Movement idea: You have control and influence in every point of the economic spectrum. With your personal income, by dining out, visiting a tavern or a museum, you invest in your city by spending your money here.

As a business owner, you have greater influence yet. You introduce local suppliers and vendors into your supply chain. Accept a price differential, knowing you are supporting local jobs. And by generating and supporting local jobs, your funds boomerang back to you, full circle, when the locals buy your products and services.

Additionally, you would be providing job opportunities for youth in our city, via the Baltimore City YouthWorks program. Offer internships and provide valuable hands-on experience for these young workers. Training and developing local talent is paramount to improving economic equality. Kudos to McCormick for choosing to stay in Maryland, keeping 2,100 jobs locally!

Donations, contributions and in-kind support can be registered on newly established sites, www.baltimorebusinessrecovers.org and www.marylandunites.org. Local businesses can register their needs, on these same sites, and an individual case manager will be assigned to tackle issues around construction, permitting, insurance claims, etc. The United Way has collected \$250,000 in donations so far. PNC Bank is working with the Baltimore Development Corporation to provide grants, and these are just some of the generous and innovative solutions surfacing, with additional offers coming in daily.

Furthermore, I would encourage you to become more strategic. Flex your social responsibility muscle by leveraging your allocated marketing/sponsorship budget to drive change. Support the organizations that are driving true economic revolution and create a widespread ripple effect. For instance, Big Brothers Big Sister of Greater Chesapeake has a one-to-one mentoring match process that alters a kid's future. Last week alone, the organization saw a 3,000 percent increase in volunteer inquiries. But money is needed to cover the increased activity, the background checks, case managers, etc. So, give!

For the last 17 years, Open Society Institute-Baltimore has been intimately involved in the root causes of social justice, work that takes time and research but is instrumental in improving the lives of Baltimoreans. OSI has been deeply engaged in changing the dialogue, convening the community, influencing policy and advocating for effective change. This work needs amplifying voices and financial support; it needs business support and engagement to intensify the ripple effect. Consider hosting an informational session to educate and engage your employees. Get involved, and encourage your employees to get involved, on committees and boards. Learn how to support the communities you do business in.

My expectation is not that you cease your for-profit venture, but rather we build a stronger partnership within the public, private and foundation sectors. Lead by example and become involved, like Monica Mitchell, a young mother of two boys who began a movement. Unable to sleep, at 3:30 a.m. on Tuesday, April 28, she and her brother, Jason Butler, agreed to meet on Pennsylvania and North avenues armed with ... brooms.

"It looked like a war zone and the mess was overwhelming," she wrote on her Facebook page. "But then we picked up a piece of trash. And then another. Broom sweep by broom sweep clearing glass out of the intersection so that people going to work wouldn't get flat tires. Clearing trash so that the bus stop and subway entrance looked clean.

"Soon one corner was clean. Then, amazingly police officers started picking up the trash around them. And a few journalists held bags for us as we dumped our shovels full of trash. And then one by one, neighbors who saw us on the early morning news came down with their brooms and trash bags too!

"At 4 a.m., there were only a handful of people, hoping to make a difference in the midst of chaos. By 7 p.m. tonight, thousands had come out to help clean up, neighbors hugging and laughing, drumlines. There is hope and there's love and there are people ready to do the work in Baltimore."

And that's the story of Baltimore, of the United States.

Monica started a movement. She is leading by example, influencing her children, her neighbors and her community. Inspiring us.

You have the same ability. This is NOT charity, and although I'm grateful for the financial generosity (and more funding is still needed), I ask for your time and personal investment. Commit to staying for the long haul.

Seek local vendors. Hire local employees. Change the conversation. Be part of the movement.

Till next time.

**This article was originally posted on The Daily Record.*

<http://thedailyrecord.com/2015/05/03/veronica-cool-how-can-businesses-help/>