

REPORT BRIEF

Leadership Perspectives:

Leading and Looking Ahead Through COVID-19

*The full e-book features 30 profiles and interviews with communication executives about the impact of COVID-19; the increased importance of internal communication; return to work; future of business and the industry; diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives; impact of Black Lives Matter protests; and corporate purpose. **This brief focuses on one specific theme in the ebook.***

Theme: Corporate Purpose

Key Findings of how corporate purpose drives decision-making in COVID-19:

- Corporate purpose and company values have served as the “North Star” for communication executives, serving as their primary guide for decision-making in COVID-19. Most noted that health and safety of their stakeholders was most important.
- Many respondents who mentioned corporate purpose also noted the importance of giving back and how they were actively contributing to the community through in-kind donations, monetary support, and matching employee donations.
- Leaders said organizations with a strong corporate purpose are better equipped to get through crisis situations such as this.

“At Novelis, we are driven by our purpose of shaping a sustainable world together, and are committed to keeping our people and communities healthy and safe during these challenging times. From our charitable giving, to work-from-home flexibility, to using our aluminum to make cradles for ventilators, our purpose is at the heart of all we do.”

-Matt Bianco, Head of Corporate Public Affairs, Novelis, Inc.

“At Macy’s, giving back is in our DNA. We’ve supported our local communities in many ways, including raising over \$1 million dollars for the Meals on Wheels COVID-19 Response Fund, providing 100,000 meals and check-ins for vulnerable seniors. Additionally, some of our office locations have donated perishables to local shelters and food banks while our teams work remotely. In some store locations, our parking lots have held graduation ceremonies for local high schools, enabling seniors to walk across the stage and receive their diplomas with their extended family viewing live from their cars and listening on an FM channel.”

-Jill Carapellotti, Group Vice President, Corporate Communications, Macy’s Inc.

“At Horizon, we believe it is our fundamental responsibility to support the communities where we live and work, as well as our global community. As a result, we felt strongly that it was our responsibility to step up during the COVID-19 crisis. We donated \$1.5 million to COVID-19 response efforts in Illinois and in other impacted communities where our employees live and work, including Washington, D.C., South San Francisco, Canada, and Dublin, Ireland.

In addition, we are matching employee donations to nonprofits in their communities, including local foodbanks and COVID-19 relief funds and also provided a list of digital volunteering opportunities and suggestions to employees, such as ordering from a local restaurant and having it delivered to a local domestic violence shelter.”

-Geoff Curtis, Executive Vice President, Corporate Affairs and Chief Communications Officer, Horizon Therapeutics

“In our weekly Harris Poll on COVID-19, Americans have signaled that they expect corporate America to protect and help safeguard society. While our government institutions must play a critical role, Americans expect companies to protect the health and safety of their employees (80%), speak out on social issues (68%), demonstrate their corporate purpose and values (68%), and take action for the greater social good (78%). This is a standard we long have valued inside Stagwell, and it’s advice we provide each day to our clients.”

-Ray Day, Vice Chair, Stagwell

“As our CEO shared during an interview, during times of crisis, organizations act based on their values and culture. Everyone can look good when times are good. When times are challenging, you can see whose values, culture and purpose are genuine.

Throughout the crisis, as employees have asked about hypothetical things that could happen and what the company would do, I have told them that we will also make decisions based on the health and safety of our people. That is the one answer for the hundreds of scenario-based questions that could be asked.

Also, purpose, culture and values – and their authenticity – have been demonstrated in organizational responses to racial injustice and societal unrest.”

-Paul Gennaro, Senior Vice President and Chief Communications Officer, Voya Financial

“In a virtual working world, the transference of culture becomes even more acute. Do your values hold true? Do your operating principles continue? In a virtual working world are people invisible? Luckily, what we’ve experienced as both W2O and with our clients is that culture has become even more important and hardened during this pandemic. Respect, value, purpose, integrity are shining through collapsing silos and political barriers as people forge a better way to exist.”

-Gary Grates, President, W2O Group

“It could be said that our purpose is to keep people fed, nourished and comforted. During the pandemic, there continues to be significant increased strain on community resources to ensure children, teenagers, adults and senior citizens have access to food. We have relied on the Conagra Brands Foundation to donate food and funds to partners – like Feeding America – who can direct product and monies where they are needed most.”

-Jon Harris, Senior Vice President and Chief Communications Officer, Conagra

“Purpose-driven companies are uniquely positioned to enhance their reputations by staying committed to the better angels of their core values. According to The RepTrak Company, formerly Reputation Institute, consumers’ decisions will be shaped by the way a company takes care of their employees and communities, more so than other stakeholders, like investors.”

-Catherine Hernandez-Blades, SVP, Chief ESG and Communications Officer, Aflac

“As a healthcare company, we are intrinsically focused on improving the health and wellbeing of people around the world. And, as a purpose-driven organization rooted in CSR-based management, responding to global health crises locally and globally and working to ensure access to health is at the heart of what we do. We’ve provided financial assistance to support local and global communities; supported employee volunteerism and company-matched donations to humanitarian organizations; and supported legislative policies focused on the wellbeing of our employees, healthcare professionals, patients and partners. We’re seeing this purpose extend to a highly engaged (93%+) employee workforce with deep roots in the community.”

-Moyra Knight, Vice President Corporate Communications, Astellas US; President, Astellas Global Health Foundation

“Our corporate purpose includes our values – for example, the importance of accountability, to the company and each other – as well as a look to the greater good as a responsible investor. That has continued to rally employees and allow us to shift quickly from a global investment company to a global aid delivery company, in a matter of days.”

-Brian Lott, Chief Communications Officer, Mubadala

“During this time, we were also mindful of the need to express our values and purpose as our own people, their families, and the communities we serve were suffering. With the support of the CEO, we were able to move fast to establish a new community giving program, ‘Bringing Home Everywhere’, which facilitated essential home, infant, health and personal care item donations that many communities need at this time. We’ve also sent essential items to first responders and people in healthcare or nursing facilities to support them during a difficult time. I was also proud that we could pivot this program to show support for Black communities in recent weeks, partnering with the NAACP to provide essential support to its members and the communities it serves.”

-Dominic Pendry, Head of Corporate Communications, Bed Bath & Beyond

“Southwest’s Purpose is to connect people to what’s important in their lives through friendly, reliable and low-cost air travel. No one, from the CEO to the line mechanic lost sight of that purpose, even in the dark days of April when planes were flying with one or two people on board. There was broad understanding of the essential service we provide, and a pride that even when very few people were on board, we were there when people needed us—sometimes that was to bring a soldier home to his final resting place; other times it was to deliver a pallet of respirators to a hospital in need. No one lost sight of the role we play in connecting people to what’s important in their lives. The reasons might be different, and we certainly have adapted to that new environment—no one may be rushing to their flight to get to the beach, but they are rushing to get on a flight to get to a loved one in need.”

-Linda Rutherford, Senior Vice President and Chief Communications Officer, Southwest Airlines

“Working in accordance with our purpose at this very time has been a beautiful, new experience and gives me great confidence in what is possible for the future. By focusing on our key cultural beliefs, we found ways to best support our colleagues and our customers. I believe this is an opportunity to continue to accelerate the culture. We have been very intentional about focusing on culture.”

-Senior Communications Executive in the Pharmaceuticals Industry