

Five focus areas for the most effective sports philanthropists



MEREDITH WOLFF

Sports provides one of the most powerful platforms in the world for creating a positive impact, but that visibility also means leagues, teams and athletes must be especially committed to quality. In a competitive

industry where financial support and positive media coverage are readily available for the top performers, here are five areas that sports brands can focus on to generate maximum impact.

■ Make the case — Doing good is good for business

Charitable work is worth doing for altruistic reasons alone, but there's absolutely a business case for doing it as well. When a team, league or athlete is associated with positive outcomes in their community, this yields support not only for more charitable work, but also for the brand in general. Athletes who are admired by fans on and off the field are more valuable to their teams and more sponsor-able and this positive impact can be leveraged at the team and league levels as well. Doing good is good for business.

■ Refined mission — Tighter focus, stronger impact

A common pitfall of the nonprofit sector is a tendency to try to do too many things or say yes to every request. Sports philanthropists are not immune to this mistake. Adhering to a refined mission yields better results not only for those you serve, but also the athlete, team or league doing the work. This in turn increases confidence from supporters, generates tangible impact and motivates the athlete, team or league to continue the work.

"Aligning organizational mission to outcome enhances our ability to make the impact we desire," says Kathy Bihl, vice president of programs and education at the Tiger Woods Foundation and Sports Impact Leadership Certificate (SILC) faculty member. "Moreover, being clear about who we are, what we care about and how we make a difference helps us extend our reach by



Swimmer Michael Phelps is well-known for his foundation's work with Boys & Girls Clubs.

attracting external support and developing partnerships to broaden impact."

■ Collaboration — You don't have to (and shouldn't!) do it all yourself

Countless nonprofits are currently working hard to make an impact through sport, or in support of causes that those in the sports industry wish to champion. Rather than duplicating these efforts, sports brands should seek to collaborate and benefit from the efforts and expertise of others.

"I cannot overstate the importance of collaboration for effective and impactful programs in our industry," said Melanie LeGrande, vice president of social responsibility at Major League Baseball and an SILC faculty member. "Baseball has successfully worked with different charitable and corporate partners on a number of our initiatives, and we have seen firsthand how coming together under a common goal can drive both business results and positive change in our communities."

SILC faculty member Kristine Burton, vice president of MSG's Garden of Dreams Foundation, agrees: "While increased efficiency and improved problem solving are clear outcomes, the most important results, especially in the nonprofit/foundation space are ultimately better delivery of your product to your constituents and

increased potential for funds."

■ Artful storytelling — You are more than your data

"There is a trend developing to share impact in creative ways and I always encourage clients to be unique in how they deliver data," says Alisha Greenberg, co-director of SILC and founder of Rounding Third LLC.

The importance of data cannot be overstated — whether it's measuring the impact of a sports program on a community or calculating the cost of engagement per child, like any philanthropist, an athlete, league or team should focus on generating quantitative positive outcomes. But success stories, literal heartfelt testimonials, which give charitable work the "human touch," are sometimes of the greatest value in furthering your work.

■ Advocacy and activism — Get informed and then act

In today's political climate, a lot of attention is being paid to the role sports can play in advocating for a cause or the athlete as activist, but this concept is not new and it is broader than taking a knee or making a statement.

The key to successful advocacy and activism lies in proper education about the facts

Next steps to being an effective sports philanthropist:

- 1. Doing good is good for business:** Athletes, teams and leagues can build a more positive brand through effective, impactful community work.
- 2. Mission matters:** Be focused on a specific cause and tangible outcomes; don't drift away from your core purpose.
- 3. Collaborate:** Athletes, leagues and teams are primarily in the business of sport. Create partnerships to ensure you benefit from the expertise of others, maximize resources and avoid duplication.
- 4. Tell your story:** Combine images, testimonials and personal experiences from your work with data that proves its worth.
- 5. Educate yourself, then take action:** The key to successful advocacy and activism is knowing your topic and then moving beyond a statement to actions that drive outcomes.

surrounding the topic and a measured and deliberate plan of action to support the cause. Any time a sports figure or organization identifies a cause to align with, there is an opportunity to become an activist and advocate for positive change or outcomes on behalf of that cause. By learning and understanding as much as possible and then utilizing the unique platform of sports to protest, unite or influence allows for maximum effectiveness.

Nearly every team, league or player in the sports industry is engaging in some type of charitable activity. In order to achieve maximum impact, it is vital to take a disciplined and focused approach.

SBJ readers are invited to attend SILC's advocacy and activism panel on Nov. 3 at Johns Hopkins University. Speakers include Sherrie Deans, executive director of the NBPA Foundation; Mara Gubuan, global sports and human rights advocate and co-founder of Shirzanan; and Wade Davis II, diversity and inclusion consultant and former NFL player. Email SILC@jhu.edu to RSVP or for more information.

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