

**Address by HRH The Prince of Wales**  
**PER CENT CLUB ANNUAL MEETING**  
14 November 1991

- \* I recall launching the Per Cent Club five years ago at No. 10 Downing Street with a handful of founding companies. Two years ago we committed to increase our membership and I am pleased to report that nearly 500 companies have now become Per Cent Club members, in spite of the recession.
- \* Through the establishment of Regional Per Cent Clubs in the Sheffield and North East, we have added a new dimension to our membership with **many more small and medium-sized companies getting involved.**
- \* I hope that the Per Cent Club's new ***Guidelines for Companies* will encourage companies to report their involvement** more widely and in greater depth so that many more businesses can benefit from their example.
- \* The forms of that involvement have changed over the last five years. Companies now **contribute more than cash** to their local communities - including expertise, staff time and in-kind resources - which adds value to their community role.
- \* Another important development is that **business is now supported by a wide range of partnerships**, including TECs, business leadership teams, education-business partnerships, Local Enterprise Agencies and Local Authorities.
- \* I am pleased that many more **companies are beginning to recognise the benefits of encouraging the direct involvement of their employees** in the community. By creating an environment in which volunteering can flourish, companies gain more well-rounded, committed employees and therefore a better-quality business at every level. Employee volunteering is, I think, one of the newest and most exciting channels for business involvement in the community.
- \* This does not mean coercing employees into involvement; volunteering must remain, after all, a gift from the heart of each individual. Employers need to be concerned, not so much with *what* employees do but with *how* they can do it. They must provide the seedbeds from which programmes can blossom.
- \* I am delighted to hear that the Leadership Team, led by Sam Whitbread, is actively involved in developing the scale and quality of employee volunteering programmes. When I launched the UK Employee Volunteering initiative in 1990, my challenge then was to establish employee volunteering programmes in every enlightened company in the land. I suppose I must have been referring to the members of the Per Cent Club!
- \* Pioneering companies such as Whitbreads, Allied Dunbar and the Post Office have taken the UK employee volunteering movement a long way in a short period of time. Several of the participants in my **Business Leadership Programme** had an opportunity to visit **Allied Dunbar** in Swindon, where employee volunteering is second nature to their employees.
- \* They discovered five key ingredients which were vital to the community programme's success:

- 1) **Genuine commitment** by the company, not just public relations gloss;
- 2) **Top management** involvement;
- 3) A **range of initiatives** which allowed employees to choose a cause to which they could apply their skills and experience;
- 4) **Integration** of community involvement with mainstream business activities; and
- 5) A **professional approach**, including budgeting for staff and other forms of programme support.

\* I have had a number of opportunities to observe what a powerful force employee volunteering can become in the community. In America, for example, one in five Fortune 500 companies encourage employee volunteering. In 1989, President George Bush declared that, *"From now on in America, any definition of a successful life must include serving others"*.

\* Here in the UK, three out of four people are already involved in volunteering and 20% of these individuals have the support of their employers. There are many volunteering programmes which focus on different age groups and different sectors in the community. I am pleased that two of my organisations, Business in the Community and the Prince's Trust, support volunteering with their own programmes.

\* The **Prince's Trust Volunteers** initiative is a personal development programme for 16-24 year-olds which involves both employed and unemployed young people in local community projects. Companies who recognise employee volunteering as a valuable tool could consider the Volunteers programme for their younger staff members to develop their team work, social awareness and personal skills in the more intensive programme.

\* **Employees in the Community** is a Business in the Community initiative which encourages employees to develop schemes enabling their employees to volunteer in their local communities.

\* As employers you have an important role to play. To make volunteering an integral part of your business, you must take the lead. It means making and declaring a genuine commitment to your employees' involvement. It means creating a positive environment in which your staff can develop programmes with which they can identify. And it means organising and sustaining support for those programmes, just as you would do for any other business activity.

\* I believe that volunteering can have a dramatic impact - on people, on companies and on whole communities. If all of us commit to becoming **"volunteers for life"** - applying our skills and ambition to the causes which we value - we can together enhance the quality of life, not only for ourselves, but for society as a whole.