Managing Your Strategic Assets
Great Expectations?

By Ricardo C. Byrd

The organization that I serve, the National Association of Neighborhoods, represents the grassroots of America. Our members provide food and shelter for the homeless, find and train people for jobs, teach young kids to read and help older ones go to college. They also — when they must — have the courage to confront drug dealers, and will publicly challenge a city council person, a mayor, a governor or a corporate CEO about a position on an important public policy issue.

respect and trust. In that light, I have a few thoughts that might help those businesses that are ready to advance to the next level of working with and through neighborhood organizations.

Getting the Most from an Advisory Panel

■ For the panel to have credibility, your opponents must be asked and even encouraged to participate.

■ It is essential that a panel be led by co-chairs who represent the plant and the community.

■ Seek leadership from ministers and school principals who generally command respect to avoid having the panel become a forum to “bash the plant.”

■ All meetings must be open to the public — secrecy will destroy the credibility of the panel.

■ The plant manager (or on occasion, if necessary, another senior operating officer) must attend the meeting.

■ Pay different places in the community — churches, schools and recreation centers — to host panel meetings. (The going contribution is around $500, plus the cost of food and beverages.) Request that the host assist in getting people to the meeting.

■ Let the community speak. The more you listen, the more the community will realize and believe that you care and that these meetings belong to them.

■ Do not let your technical experts take over a discussion, or worse, an entire meeting.

■ Meetings alone will not do the trick. Plan at least two events — one in the winter and one in the summer — that will bring all factions together.

■ To address the hard challenges, you need to create trust and team spirit. Start by focusing more of your efforts on two groups — the kids and the elderly. Consider doing one or more of the following: adopt the neighborhood school; sponsor or assist a summer camp for kids; consider job recruitment in neighborhoods bordering the plant; or create or assist existing food assistance programs for the elderly.

What do communities expect of their industrial neighbors? Really nothing more than they wish from all their neighbors: concern for their mutual well-being and pride in their mutual surroundings. You must commit yourself and all the people in your plant to knowing the community — its desires and its requirements. In turn, you may find the community becomes increasingly aware of your concerns, your limitations and your desires.

A local advisory panel is a great way to begin building a great neighborhood.

This article is an excerpt from a speech given at the Waste Network Meeting in Baltimore, Md., in June. For a copy of the complete speech, visit the Waste Team site on MemberExchange.

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