

Making the Case: *Why Prevention Matters*

Across the nation there has been great progress in work to improve the health and well-being of children. But the turbulent economy and the budget cutting that has come with it threaten to derail efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect at a moment when it is needed most. If the work that has done so much for children is to continue and to grow, it is important to show that it yields benefits on many levels—for children, their families, and their communities. Consistent decisions to support the needs of children are at the heart of a bright future. The information offered in the “Why Prevention Matters” series will help those working so hard to improve the lives of our youngest citizens.

Better Lives for Children Lead to a Better Climate for Business

– *Michael E. Axelrod*

Author’s note: The most important reason to prevent child abuse and neglect is to improve the lives and hopes of children. But the benefits to society extend well beyond better lives for young people. The consequences of child abuse and neglect have a huge impact on the business community, both in the short term and in the long term; one more reason for making prevention a high priority.

Prevention of child abuse and neglect advances universal business needs by:

- Managing costs and controlling expenses, especially healthcare costs
- Preparing a better educated workforce to remain competitive in the global marketplace
- Resulting in a more productive workforce to maintain/increase profitability

How and why preventing child abuse and neglect addresses these needs:

- **Managing Healthcare Costs:** These are a major expense of large and small businesses, and will continue to grow under the current system. Prevention can control costs: The Adverse Childhood Experience Study (see *The Effects of Childhood Stress on Health Across the Lifespan*) has shown that abused and neglected children are much more likely to have health problems in adulthood such as depression, substance abuse, diabetes and heart disease.
- **Managing Actual and Hidden Taxes:** It has been estimated that \$104 billion dollars of direct and indirect costs to society result from failure to prevent child abuse and neglect. Some portion of this flows through to businesses either as direct or indirect taxes.
- **Managing Recruitment/Training Costs:** Creating a work environment that is family friendly will help create family environments that have a reduced likelihood of abuse. This will enable employers to attract and retain good employees, reducing the heavy costs of recruiting and training new employees.
- **Better Educated Workforce – The Long Term:** Children abused or neglected from birth through age five, when the brain reaches 90 percent of its growth, experience changes in the architecture and chemistry of their brains that will have an adverse impact on their ability to learn and on their memory. Thus, prevention results in a greater capacity to learn. This will lead to a better educated workforce which is critical in an increasingly competitive global marketplace.
- **More Productive Workforce – The Short Term:** Good prevention strategies in the community allow parents and caregivers in the workforce to avoid absenteeism to deal with, for example, the medical needs of children who have been abused or neglected. They will also reduce “presenteeism,” the lack of productivity due to employee concerns about children in at-risk situations. Productivity is inextricably linked to profitability.

What Can Business Do?

There are three important ways the business community, including both large and small businesses, can assist with prevention efforts. Specifically:

- **Support Existing Infrastructure:** To address these issues as cost-effectively and efficiently as possible, businesses should work with and strengthen the existing organizations at the state and local level that provide evidence based prevention programs and general public education by providing cash support and intellectual capital such as loaned executives and pro bono professional services.
- **Create enabling conditions for workers to support their families and remain productive:** Businesses have the opportunity to provide the means to create conditions in families and communities that increase the health and well-being of children and families. These enabling conditions can help parents who might otherwise be in stressful situations that enhance the risk of abusing their children to find information, support, and resources, and learn coping strategies that would help them to parent effectively. For example, businesses can provide on-site family paid child care and assess the supports available through their Employee Assistance Programs.
- **Assist with Advocacy and Policy:** Businesses can work with existing coalitions to advocate for the policies and programs, both public and private, that support the direct delivery of prevention services and creation of needed protective factors.

Prevention of child abuse and neglect is important for each individual child. But when the results of prevention are added together across society, larger sectors will improve, including the business sector in which it is clear that investment in prevention will result in a significant long term return on investment.

For further reading, what follows are the research references mentioned in this article.

1. Middlebrooks JS, Audage, NC. *The Effects of Childhood Stress on Health Across the Lifespan*. Atlanta (GA) CDC, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control; 2007.

About the Author

Michael E. Axelrod is the Managing Member of Trinova Partners LLC, a business consulting firm in Atlanta, GA. He serves as the Vice Chairman of the Board of Prevent Child Abuse Georgia, Inc. and from November 2001 through October 2003 was Chairman of the Board of Prevent Child Abuse America. He is a frequent lecturer at the Goizueta Business School of Emory University where he teaches entrepreneurship.

Better Lives for Children Lead to a Better Climate for Business

Author: Michael E. Axelrod, President and CEO of Trinova Partners LLC, a business consulting firm in Atlanta, GA. He serves on the Advisory Board of Prevent Child Abuse Georgia, Inc. and is the former Chairman of the Board of Prevent Child Abuse America.

The following questions and answers are designed to help you deliver the prevention message to the business community. You will note that one of the recurring themes is research. To be as effective as possible there is a lot that must be known before you deliver the prevention message and seek the support for prevention efforts.

Q: How Should I Respond to Pushback Because of the Bad Economy?

A: First, children are most in need during bad economic times because the rates of child abuse and neglect always rise under these conditions. Second, for prevention pay off, it is critical to start now. Finally, companies can not lose sight of the fact that economic conditions will turn around; therefore, it remains important to invest in (1) “protective factors” for families and children; (2) the well-being of their current workforce (avoid absenteeism and “presenteeism”); and (3) reducing healthcare expenses.

Q: Who Makes the Decision at a Business to Support Prevention Activities?

A: To make your presentation and request as efficient a process as possible, it is critical to reach the business’s decision-maker as soon as possible. Depending on the size of the business, the decision-maker will differ. For example, (1) in a small family-owned business, the president will likely make the final decision; and (2) in a large, public company, the decision-maker may be the head of human resources, the head of marketing or the head of corporate responsibility. One of your first tasks will be to identify the right person. Also, having someone introduce you to the decision-maker will be more effective than a cold call.

Q: What is the Best Way to Make a Presentation to a Business?

A: You are “selling” a product – prevention of child abuse and neglect. This is what businesses understand and your approach needs to keep this in mind. While it may feel uncomfortable to deal with the concept of selling, this is the reality.

- Speak in a language that businesses understand. It is often said that numbers are the language of business. Be prepared to talk about the scope of the problem, to give data to support your claims and explain how funds will be used.
- Make the assumption that the person with whom you are speaking has limited time. Your case statement must be concise and to the point. If you have an in-person meeting, a rambling presentation will not be effective.

- Be prepared to answer any questions the businessperson may have, such as how their donation will be used (general operating funds, program specific, etc.) and how results will be reported.

Q: What Will Drive the Decision?

A: Businesses will make the decision to support prevention activities based on a myriad factors, and it will often be difficult to determine the one that triggers a positive decision. Therefore, critical steps include the following:

- *Research:* Make sure you understand the prospect’s giving history, especially to children’s issues. Be able to explain how prevention activities may fit in their current philanthropic priorities. For example, if the business’s focus is education, talk about how prevention can lead to better school readiness, and how the proper development of brain architecture, without the stress of abuse and neglect, is more likely to lead to school success.
- *Make the case:* Once you’ve done your research, tie the prevention issue to the prospect’s business. For example, a business selling children’s products will be predisposed to a children’s issue; a business manufacturing ball bearings will have to be sold based on factors such as cost savings and work force issues.
- *Brand connection:* Can you tie prevention to a particular product or brand the company sells?
- *Competition:* Don’t assume that the business doesn’t know anything about prevention organizations. Be prepared to respond to questions like “How does your program differ from what [another prevention organization] does?”

Q: Who Gives the Money?

A: In many situations, the money does not come from a business itself, but from a foundation set up by the business. Make sure to address your message to the correct source of support.

Q: What Types of Support Can the Business Provide?

A: Recognize that not all businesses can give money but might still want to support the prevention cause. Many businesses may be able to give important in-kind support such as printing, loaned executives, meeting space, access to customers, access to employees, expertise, advocacy assistance, volunteers, professional services and more. Don't have an "I'll get back to you" response; have a specific wish list that includes more than the need for money

Q: What About Leaving Behind Written Materials?

A: Well-written, professional-looking materials can be very effective; poorly written or produced materials can be a quick turn-off. Materials on someone's desk can keep your organization from being forgotten once you leave the room. At the same time, leaving behind too many materials may cause the recipient to think it will take too much time to review them. Be strategic in what you leave behind. You can always send more materials if requested. It may also be effective if your organization has something tangible to leave, such as a blue ribbon pin or a Pinwheels for Prevention pin.

Q: When Can You Expect an Answer?

A: You will need to be patient. As much as we correctly believe that prevention is a critical, time-sensitive issue, the business might not see it that way. It is important that you gauge, as part of your meeting, when you can expect to hear back from the business. It is a fair question to ask. Then, if you don't get an answer, be sure to follow-up.

Q: How Does Government Support Relate to the Potential of Private Sector Support?

A: One of the topics currently being debated in the philanthropic sector is whether the private sector should set priorities and lead the government sector, or follow the government sector's priorities. It is important to be able to let the business know what government support is being provided for prevention issues in your state. If there is government support, you probably have a better argument. If there is not government support, you must be able to explain why that should not stand in the way of private sector support.

Q: Where Can We Get Information on the Business?

A: Research is critical. You will hurt your case if you don't understand with whom you are dealing. Information on a business is available from a variety of sources, depending on the size of the business. If you are dealing with a public company, then you can get information from networking in the community, internet research, and reports that the business files with government agencies. For example, public companies have to file reports with the Securities and Exchange Commission and are available for free through the company's website. For smaller businesses, information will most likely have to come from internet research and community networking.

