

Foreword

Working together for the common good – the conviction that people joining forces in a spirit of cooperation can accomplish great things together – is a fundamental element of the American story. From the country’s founders to the philanthropists and volunteers throughout US history, generations of Americans have demonstrated their commitment to the “greater common good”. The activities of countless nonprofit organizations and individuals who help out every day at health clinics, day care centers, local homeless shelters, schools and churches reflect this spirit.



An evolving concept of corporate responsibility is also part of this philanthropic spirit, and today, most companies, like AmCham Germany member companies, accept social and civic responsibilities as a part of doing business. An effective corporate social responsibility program attracts consumers and bolsters public relations; but it can also make a company more innovative and create a more rewarding environment for the company’s employees. Strengthening relationships with community stakeholders helps a company stay abreast of evolving market preferences and new technologies. Social problems may present daunting challenges, but addressed properly, they also present vast opportunities for growth. In other words, it is possible not only to do well and to do good; it is also possible to do well by doing good.

At its best, business has always been about innovating to meet society’s needs and to build a profitable enterprise – two goals that are particularly important today as we continue to recover from the economic downturn. Within the next decade, we will undoubtedly see a number of new models for corporate responsibility. For example, I am fascinated by the emergence of a new “for-benefit” sector of the economy that interacts with, but is separate from, government, nonprofits and for-profit businesses. These enterprises have social or environmental outcomes as their bottom line; but they derive their income mostly from the sale of goods and services rather than from grants and donations. Call it corporate social innovation, social entrepreneurship or venture philanthropy, I believe this for-benefit structure could have an enormous impact both on our society and our economies.

Notions of best practices in business change over time. The question of what a successful company is – or ought to be – is one that is up for constant debate and development. This ongoing discussion is also an integral part of the way we interpret and implement our values, and AmCham Germany’s commitment and initiative in the area of corporate responsibility provides an excellent example of the values our two countries share.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. B. Emerson', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

John B. Emerson

US Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany