

## **A Conversation with Tim Sanders**

**In *SAVING THE WORLD AT WORK* you claim that when a company becomes a positive force for enriching people, communities, and the environment, not only does it save the world, but it saves the company from being irrelevant. Can you explain this?**

Companies need to change with the times, and serve the most current set of customer values. My research suggests that customers (from consumer to business to government) want to make a difference with their purchase dollars. They are asking questions of their suppliers about people, community and planet implications. Companies that have the right answers will get the business and maintain relevant brands. I believe that the “make a difference factor” will be the leading attribute in brand building over the next few decades. It’ll replace “being different.”

**Are there any specific companies you feel are in danger of becoming obsolete and/or irrelevant? Why?**

First the bad news: Any company that doesn’t innovate in the area of people/community development and sustainability is in trouble. Look at Detroit: The Big 3 are scrambling to catch up to Toyota at a technological and reputational basis. It’s ugly. This will spread to other industries in manufacturing, and eventually spill over into services and even government. When I talk to companies today, I tell them that “Good is the new Great.”

Now the good news: Any company can be turned around by a few innovators who can sell their “good for us/them/everyone” ideas up to leadership. Interface Flor, Wal-Mart, and GE are all examples of this. Small companies can go from “just-for-profit” to “profit plus purpose,” too. In fact, it is actually easier for them to do it because they aren’t public.

**On the upside, what companies do you feel are a great role model of the Responsibility Revolution? Why? Is there a trend in the companies that are part of the Responsibility Revolution; i.e., are the companies mostly finance, entertainment, advertising, charities, etc? If there is a certain trend or pattern, and why is that?**

I’ve found companies in every industry that have exemplified the innovation that I advocate in the book. Aveda (personal care), Patagonia (apparel and sporting goods), Timberland, Costco, GE, Wal-Mart, Green Mountain Coffee Roasters, Interface Flor (commercial carpet), Microsoft, CIBC (banking), Nokia (telecom), SAS Institute (software), Salesforce.com (services) and Citibank (financial) are featured in my book. I’ve found that innovators emerge as industries come under fire for their social misgivings (Interface Flor did their eco-turnaround in ’94 – Wal-Mart started theirs in 2005). The pattern is simple: Customers want something new, innovators give it to

them, the market explodes and the basis of competition in that industry changes. If this hasn't happened to your industry yet, it's coming soon!

**You talk about Saver Soldiers and Saver CEOs, but there are many human interest stories in here that apply to those outside the boardroom. Can you discuss?**

Responsible companies are full of humans that care about each other as well as the greater community. In researching the book, I found dozens of heart warming stories about great people that took their personal values to work and helped the company build a culture of compassion – key to success in the future. One woman donated her kidney to a coworker. Another woman gave a book to her CEO, and converted him into a radical eco-evangelist. One man took his entire team to a coworker's funeral and lifted the spirits of the bereaved. Another man gave a well timed sincere complement and saved a life. These simple stories illustrate that anyone can save the world at work, either in a highly localized way or on a global scale.

**In a time where businesses are closing down and hundreds of people are getting laid off, it is obvious that the economy is going through tough times. How can a company become or remain a positive force during these hard times of budget cuts and low moral?**

First of all, according to a Summer 2008 survey I conducted with Zoomerang, a high percentage of people think that our current economic woes are the result of corporate corruption (banks to oil companies to speculators). They blame companies more than the government or greedy individuals. In my book, I argue that this mistrust of business fuels the responsibility revolution. It's like 2002 and Enron/WorldCom all over again.

Second, social responsibility is not a cost driver, per se. It is not about spending more money to be a positive force, it is about innovation. There is an old saying in CSR world that goes something like this: "Responsible business is not about how much money you give away, it is about how you make your money." I give dozens of practical tips on how to re-imagine your business operations and make a difference – while saving dollars. One CEO, who read the book, told me that if his employees followed a few of my eco tips alone, his company would save millions of dollars a year.

Finally, the current tough economic climate demands that companies step in and fill the gaps left by government and NGOs. If any entity can help struggling communities, corporate America can. When they do, they improve the talent pool as well as stabilize the services they depend on. When I give speeches to business leaders I ask them, "If not you, then who? If not now, then when?"

**Why was this book so important for you to write?**

This book is going to be a major part of my life's work because I think it is time for good people to take their values to work – and make a difference. When I discovered this business trend (the responsibility revolution), I realized that for the first time in the

history of capitalism a company could truly do well by doing good. That is great news for people that have compassion for their coworkers, local communities and the planet.

You now have permission to connect your business with the new cutting edge: Where the greater community's needs intersect with your organization's capabilities.

A few years ago, when I first started working on this book, I saw actor George Clooney on a television program talking about why he went with his father to Darfur to raise awareness about the genocide going on there. His father had struggled for years to get heads of state or non-profits involved. George said that one day he told his dad, "I just realized that I have a no limit credit card called 'fame' that I've never used. So let's break it in." He went with his dad to the scene of the atrocity, held a press conference, and important people from George Bush Jr. to the Red Cross responded. When I saw what George did with his fame, I realized that I need to leverage my talents as a researcher/writer and lecturer to make a difference as well.

**If there is one message you hope the reader will take away from SAVING THE WORLD AT WORK what would it be?**

That one person, regardless of rank or role, can unleash the power of many at work – and make a difference to the world.