
Hale and Dorr Helps High Tech Companies Help Less Fortunate

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By Adria Cimino *staff writer*

Being generous is not as easy as it might seem, but a Boston-based law firm plans on conquering that problem.

First of all, there are tax and legal issues to consider. The company wishing to donate also has to figure out how much it can afford to give, what causes it would like to support, and how to organize its staff around the effort.

Companies for the most part have been left to tackle the challenge on their own. That makes one understand why some hesitate, rather than forge ahead into uncertainty. Many say they do not even know where to start when it comes to implementing an effort to share the surplus.

That's where the firm Hale and Dorr comes in. Confusion for some might not be an excuse for much longer.

The law firm is creating the Hale and Dorr Private Philanthropy Group. The effort is meant to help corporations, foundations and individuals develop and implement planned giving.

"We just saw a real need in the marketplace," said Nan Giner, partner in the private client department and co-chair of the new group. "(There has been) just a huge amount of wealth created in the last few years."

Giner says the goal is to streamline the giving process. There are a lot of good causes, making it difficult for many companies to focus their attention in one particular direction.

"They want to go help everyone," said John Hamilton, partner and chairman of the firm.

The group, which should be fully ready for business this year, will assist a company in identifying its charitable mission, help with due diligence and legal structure, and take care of evaluation and administrative duties.

About a dozen of the firm's attorneys who already work in other practice areas will take on the new task.

Giner says the group's focus on working with corporations makes it rather unique. The group hopes not only to set corporations off to a good start in charitable giving, but to work with them on an ongoing basis, as both needs and the community evolve.

Hale and Dorr chose to create the group this year due to the increasing creation of wealth and the demand for charitable giving that goes along with it.

"What differs (between today and a few years ago) is that the new entrepreneurs are looking for entrepreneurial opportunities in the charitable world," Giner said.

Bill Caporizzo, partner for the tax department and co-chair of the group, says timing has to do with the changing structure of business altogether.

Years ago, it took longer to make wealth, and therefore longer to give a portion of it to a good cause. Today, companies are "doing it all at the same time rather than after 30 years," he said.

Initially, the group sees its target audience as startups that have recently gone public. A lot of older companies, in general, already have their programs in place, but that is not the only issue.

The startups are "the ones that have this telescopic view of creating and giving away," Caporizzo said.

One firm with a philanthropic system already in place is Abuzz, a Cambridge-based forum for sharing information online. Abuzz has considered charitable giving an integral part of its corporate culture since 1998.

The company's latest effort is the promise to donate as much as \$15,000 to CitySkills, a national organization that trains inner-city residents for today's job market. The company for a few weeks this summer will give a dollar to the cause for every person who joins Abuzz.

That Abuzz can rely on the resources of its parent company, Times Company Digital, is a big advantage, company spokeswoman Christine Mohan said.

Mohan and co-workers who coordinate Abuzz's community support efforts have sought advice from the Times' legal counsel regarding language on the website and contracts for giving.

Then there is the planning.

"I think that everyone's very busy," Mohan said. "It (coordinating giving) is an extra meeting during the day."

Mohan says that her own nonprofit experience helps her through what for some might be mazelike. Lack of this insight often leads to disjointed efforts, she said. "For smaller companies and startups who don't have the support, I definitely see the need (for outside legal help)."

Although the Hale and Dorr group is not ready to predict how many clients (the attorneys did say they already have spoken with interested parties) are likely to knock on the door, the co-chairs expect the endeavor to be a substantial practice.

"What you will find after three to five years of this, many newly public companies are going to want this kind of assistance," Hamilton said. "We can see an unlimited opportunity here. If you impact one person, you've made a difference."

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