



After one of my many road presentations on the Horizon report, the president of the Midwestern chamber that was hosting me made introductions to a few of the folks who had heard my message about the future. The following exchange actually occurred... honest.

Chamber CEO: "Mick, this is Nancy, she is with the XYZ Company. They're a Fortune 100 company with facilities all over the world. She's a great member and a huge player in town."

Mick: "Hi, Nancy, nice to meet you and thanks for coming to listen this afternoon. I hope I didn't disappoint at the podium."

Nancy: "No, you did fine, Mick, we needed to hear about those influences. Thanks for coming all this way."

Mick: "Glad to be here in the Heartland! What's your day job, Nancy?"

Nancy: "I'm the vice president of economic and community development. It's my job to help chambers and other groups ensure that the places in which we operate are vibrant, attractive and prosperous."

Mick: (long silence) "Really?"

Nancy: "Yes, it's a wonderful job. I can't believe they pay me to do something I love this much."

Mick: (longer silence) "Wow!"

Chamber CEO: "We'll be back, Nancy, I want to introduce Mick to a few more folks."

Given what I hear about corporate involvement from some discouraged ACCE members, Nancy's job title and enthusiasm left me speechless. It also reminded me that the quest for support and dollars from corporations domiciled elsewhere is not a fool's errand. There are still civic-minded companies around, but plenty of others are reluctant to play or pay.

Hopefully you've got a few Nancy's in your town, but I'm sure you have a few of the reluctant variety too. So how do you make the case to a "big guy" who doesn't get it?

Every chamber and community is different I know. I'm also fully aware of how little I know about selling anything in your community. But after a career talking with company execs, chamber reps, and sales trainers, and having a little sales experience of my own, I humbly present seven messages that might help make the case to a reluctant big company. Test, adapt and share feedback freely:

1. **The "Someday" Message:** Eventually you are going to need help in this town/region to get something done or prevent mischief. A chamber investment is a kind of insurance policy. Here are three real-life examples when our chamber provided such help for large members [list them]. To quote the Godfather: "Someday, and that day may never come, I'll call on you..."
2. **The "Who Else" Message:** The chamber's purpose for existence is to make this a better place to live, work and invest. It is critical that somebody do that work. If not us, who? Government? There is no way we can possibly secure adequate resources to execute our purpose from small businesses alone.
3. **The "Perception" Message:** The perception of your company is shaped, in part, by the perception of the communities where you have a significant presence. Investors, employees and suppliers form opinions about you when they examine our town/city/region. Your commitment to the chamber is an investment in the community's appeal to your public audiences.
4. **The "Connection" Message:** Do you know the Kevin Bacon game? One of the chamber's daily goals is to bring everybody in this region within two degrees of separation, linking member businesses to suppliers, media, educators, customers, bureaucrats and legislators. You and your company need this network, even if you've got your own. When it comes to this place, you really don't know who you don't know, but we do.
5. **The "Strength in Numbers" Message:** Our strength in numbers provides "cover" to help larger companies push for meaningful policy changes – or fight against harmful ones. In addition, the chamber can take a bold position that your company might not be able to take publicly. You might believe that the chamber will do this work anyway, however, if the chamber has been underfunded it may not have the capacity to make a difference at the critical moment.
6. **The "Personal Enrichment" Message:** The chamber offers a low-cost, flexible opportunity for influential people to get out of their own shops and achieve something meaningful for a larger cause. Ask [name two big employers], who have found that direct involvement in community priorities through the chamber provides real personal satisfaction and many close relationships.
7. **The "Bargain" Message:** The cost of doing your share to help the community and economy through the chamber is very reasonable. What does a lobbyist cost? A publicist? A recruiter? A professional "fixer?" There is literally no other way to have as significant an impact for such a moderate investment.

Alternatively, you can skip these steps and just find Nancy. Onward.

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