



Prelude to the Originating Conversation

April 25, 2003

Welcome

The Center for Business Excellence was founded to sustain a dialog in New Jersey that engages business and civic leaders to advance community and public interests while benefiting business success. The Center believes in and stands for the essential role that business plays in shaping our society for the benefit of all citizens, and seeks to bring together change leaders to support true win-win initiatives that go beyond philanthropy to align the interests of businesses and the community for mutual benefit.

Leading up to this event our core team conducted a number of one-on-one interviews with selected business and community leaders in our region. These interviews identified many of the opportunities and the challenges facing this community. As one of the most prosperous regions in the country and in the world we have a unique opportunity for leadership, and for making a difference in the lives of those around us.

In these interviews we asked people to share with us their personal vision and mission, and to identify the most important changes that they and their organizations would be willing to support. Today's event is a continuation of this dialog, and we invite you to bring your sense of vocation, commitment, and self-expression to this conversation in order to discover what we can create together.

We're convinced that the majority of business leaders are interested in seeing real improvements in the life of our community, and in the business culture and climate in our state. What we need is an effective vehicle for achieving this, a vehicle for communication and accomplishment that is founded on the principles of leadership and empowerment that we seek to implement in our own organizations. We think this starts with an ongoing dialog amongst creative leaders, across organizations, as to priorities and mechanisms for successful change.

As a consequence, the work of the Center is focused in two areas: creating a contextual foundation for effective action, and providing examples of genuine win-win initiatives, initiatives that go beyond corporate philanthropy to provide benefit to the community and positive results to the bottom line.

We appreciate your support for this work, and welcome your engagement with us in bringing it to fruition.

A Framework for Smarter Growth

As several people pointed out, we need to recognize that the key to prosperity and to societal improvement is continued and sustainable growth—we need to keep growing the pie if we are going to make more individuals and communities prosper. This will occur if we undertake to invest in our own infrastructure, in better community and economic planning, in improving meaningful communication, in increasing strategic innovation.

The Center itself is an example of this perspective, in that it is really an invention for the purpose of empowering organizations. We found that the goal of leaders in organizations was most often to empower those around them, to have them take ownership and trust their intuition, their wisdom, and their experience with what is successful. We believe this applies also to the community as a whole and its members. To the extent that businesses and individuals develop and deepen their sense of ownership, and their commitment to actualizing their full potential, to that extent the community will prosper.

One of the great lessons of the American free-enterprise system is that we clearly cannot depend on government, at whatever level, to create a positive business climate. The private sector is the only real engine of economic growth, and we depend on the open market for the creation of wealth. This includes the open marketplace of ideas, which is part of what this event is about. It is about enhancing the flow of these ideas, their visibility, and their impact on the economy and the community.

If we follow these ideas through, we may create some remarkable breakthroughs in business and community thinking. Part of what distinguishes our culture is that it is about continually reinventing ourselves, reorganizing and adapting very rapidly to the challenges and opportunities we face, investing in new technologies and new approaches.

We are looking for some of this investment to flow through the Center, to support projects that the community and the business community feel strongly about.

Our goal is not to duplicate any existing initiatives, or to be an advocacy group for the interests of any sector. The difference we intend to make is to empower a conversation for effective action amongst business and community leaders in our region. It is to source and sustain existing projects as well as suggest new ones.

Our promise is that you will leave here today with a sense of possibility for what we can accomplish together to build a world-class mechanism for impacting the community and the region, and making a difference to the businesses and to the individuals who live and work here. We invite you to contribute to this dialog from your unique perspective, to bring your vision and commitment and your resources to help make them happen.