

October 6, 2017 by [Shelly Najjar](#)



Tangible Ways Entrepreneurs Can Respond to Natural Disasters

Featured News

Photo Courtesy of All Hands Volunteers



With all the natural disasters and community tragedies we see in the news, it can be hard to know how to respond or help. Eight entrepreneurs share examples of how they support their communities and how that involvement impacted their business. At the end, they give their tips to help you take action too.

Adopt a Classroom

"When Harvey hit, my company (located in Houston) adopted classrooms in low-income areas that were affected by the storm," says Bonnie Treece, founder of [The Brain Domain](#), which offers tutoring, test prep, and college counseling.



Photo Courtesy of Adopt A Classroom

"We bought school supplies for classrooms in an elementary school in the 5th ward where about 70% of the students were displaced. It felt good and we ended up getting tons of new clients the next week, but we didn't advertise what we did at all. I think it's about good karma."

Give, Train, and Listen

Brad Shaw, president and CEO of [Dallas Web Design Inc.](#), an online marketing firm, says, "As an entrepreneur and businessman, I helped others by doing the following: Donate money and goods to at least 25 families that are affected; train for first-aid and emergency response; [and] take time to talk with the victims. Sometimes, all they need is an ear to listen."

Sharing Time and Spreading Awareness

"I support my community by volunteering locally, and I use social media to spread awareness when it comes to national or global disasters. I also donate to relief efforts," says Ian Young, virtual assistant, and co-organizer of [RVA Social Entrepreneurs](#), a group of entrepreneurs committed to positive social change.

"For local disasters, it's a way to not only do my part in the community but it's also a good way to network with the organization that you're volunteering in."



Photo Courtesy of Mother Nature Network

30 Day Love Challenge

Nachi Salasini, a social impactor's personal development coach and speaker at [Live Like YOU. Now!](#), wanted to create something that "would bring more love to the people hurting over all the pain that's been going around."

"I decided to run a free 30 Day Love Challenge," she says, "to bring more love into people's worlds. Bring a little more hope and a lot more light during the dark times."

"The community appreciated and engaged with the Love Challenge because the need was there and it was a way to start their day on a more positive note. Also, through the challenge, many reconnected with old friends, felt happier, and more hopeful for better days - I know I did."

Mindfulness Meditation Albums

[Jaime Pfeffer](#), a meditation teacher, entrepreneur, and success coach, says, "I responded to both Hurricane Harvey and Hurricane Irma by offering my mindfulness albums free to people who were struggling with the emotional impacts these natural disasters can cause." Pfeffer, who was personally affected by Irma, says she knows "how the build-up to a natural disaster and the aftermath can cause huge amounts of stress, anxiety, doubt, and panic."

"I don't know if I've had direct sales as a result of these efforts but that isn't why I did it in the first place - it's really about helping out where I can."



Photo Courtesy of The Washington Examiner

Helping the Helpers

"This has been such an emotional roller coaster," says Jenny Moore, founder and president of [BlingGuard LLC](#). Despite feeling overwhelmed, when Moore saw a group of rescue vehicles, she spent time "giving hugs and talking to first responders [to thank them...]" My spirits lifted, my kids' spirits lifted. I'd like to think we lifted the spirits of all the guys we met, hugged, and spoke with."

That led to supporting first responders with meals and organizing a laundry drive (where volunteers washed first responders' clothes). Later, she helped others affected by the storm by sourcing bedding, organizing delivery of supplies, and coordinating an event to support teachers in the affected area.

"I did all these things to truly help out. I saw myself as a vessel who was simply able to use my network, my ability to solve problems, and my drive to help people. It was so good to do good. That said, my business has exploded! I met so many people, [...] and my exposure in the community as a "do-er" brought me to a different level. I have been contacted for several speaking engagements and business opportunities, and doors continue to open."



Photo Courtesy of Statesman

Entertaining Fundraisers

Noelle Rose Andressen, artistic director and dancer of [Rubans Rouges Dance](#), a dance company with an emphasis on community outreach programs, says, "We perform dance concerts through our company's outreach to fundraise for national disasters. If it's a local disaster, we provide hands-on assistance with blankets, food, [...] fundraising, and volunteering."

Andressen has seen multiple benefits. "Our employees, administrative and [...] dancers, get a sense of purpose and are pleased and proud to help their fellow humans. It creates the positive brand perception to the community as well. Sometimes, generally speaking, entertainers can be seen as selfish or out of touch; we wanted to change that preconceived notion. We become part of their extended family and not only seen as entertainers, but entertainers who care and give charitably in times of trouble."

"Tax-wise, it is listed as an 'in-kind' service or donation and has always been beneficial for us as well. We have never experienced any drawbacks or negativity from being charitable. A positive karmic deed always returns ten-fold."

Elevate the Issue

"As leaders, we have the responsibility to lead the way by example and first thing is to elevate the issue inside of our companies," says Ximena Hartsock, co-founder, and president of [Phone2Action](#), which helps businesses and citizens take a stand on the issues that matter to them.

After natural disasters and other tragedies, Hartsock uses Slack to communicate with her team to raise awareness and collect ideas. "Our employees immediately began brainstorming ways we could help, including posting information on our personal and corporate social media accounts regarding how people could locate loved ones and donate blood."

Her company also partners with other organizations and offers their technology to schools for free. She says, "Helping others is part of our culture. In fact, one of our employee benefits is three additional days of paid time off (PTO) for people to help on natural disasters or recovery issues of the person's choice. [...] Employee satisfaction and brand alignment increases when you show your employees that the bottom line is not the money."

[Your story here]

The interviewees recommend serving in ways that make sense given your experience, talents, and interests. "Whatever it is that you do best," says Andressen, "give graciously. We all have something to give. Find what you're passionate about and be real when helping others."

Salasini suggests that "entrepreneurs reconnect with their 'why,'" or their motivation, because "the best way they can serve their community will come from [that]."

"If it makes sense for your business or product," Hartsock says, "start with your product and offer it for free to help the efforts already in motion."

She also reminds us that we don't need to come up with ideas by ourselves. "Crowdsource ideas for how you can help from within your [company]. An employee may already be helping via their own community organization which you could partner with, or they may have a great idea of how your company could help."

And every local area has a place you can help, says Young. "Look for organizations who are nearby. The biggest one is HandsOn; there is a chapter in almost every major city in the country."

"Remember," says Salasini. "It's not about you, but it starts with you." When talking about her Love Challenge, she says, "I made it as easy, fun, and valuable [as I could] for the people I serve. I made it about adding more light and love to their world."

As these entrepreneurs have said, there are many benefits to supporting your community. Whether you do it for the tax write-offs, team unity, brand exposure, or the knowledge that you did a good deed, let these examples and tips inspire you to help your community in a way that feels the most natural to you.

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