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GUEST COMMENTARY

Why it pays to be good

By Charlie Crystle
Guest Writer

Our tagline is "Eat Better. For Good."

It's the "For Good" part I've been thinking a lot about lately as this caustic election year draws to a close.

Among voters, there is great support for raising the minimum wage across the political spectrum. Pennsylvania, and the federal government for that matter, need to get with the times. A minimum wage of $7.25 an hour keeps people in poverty, and that's not good for workers, their families or local businesses.

People giving a full day's work deserve a full day's pay.

We started The Lancaster Food Company to make great organic bread and other products specifically so we could hire people into good jobs that pay good wages. We source ingredients from organic farmers as close to home as possible, because buying local helps strengthen the local economy.

We primarily hire people living in the City of Lancaster, which has a poverty rate of 30 percent, and focus on hiring people out of poverty, including those with legal obstacles: we're a second-chance employer.

Our starting pay is $15 an hour, and the benefits we've experienced blow any argument for the low-pay, high-churn business model out of the water.

Low-paid workers are much more likely to quit, and replacing them is costly — losing an employee leaves a business shorthanded. Productivity drops. Teams destabilize. Training takes money and time away from building the business. Growth slows.

Not a single employee has quit The Lancaster Food Company.

It's obvious to us: when you build a business with a revolving door for people struggling to make a living, they'll take the first opportunity to leave for something better.

What do you get when you pay fair wages? Lower turnover — maybe zero. Happier, healthier, more loyal and committed employees. Better productivity. More satisfied customers.

The societal benefits of a higher wage floor are significant, as well: far less poverty, safer communities, better educational outcomes, and a stronger economy for all of us because of increased spending by the lowest-paid workers. Communities will thrive.

The increased consumer demand from higher-paid employees does wonders for a business's bottom line. It's a virtuous cycle.

There's no virtuous cycle in poverty wages. It's a vicious cycle.

When businesses pay poverty wages, it hurts people, communities and our economy. It places undue pressure on our social safety net. It means small business owners like myself, and so many others who already pay their workers living wages, are subsidizing businesses whose workers are being paid wages so low they can't survive on their full-time paychecks.

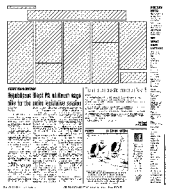
Full-time workers shouldn't need food stamps or food banks to get by. Paying a living wage should be a basic cost of doing business for all businesses.

Employees build value for businesses. Businesses can and should value those employees.

I've advocated raising the state and federal minimum wage along with businesses from a wide range of industries in Pennsylvania and nationally. I'm pleased now to be part of the Fair Pay Today campaign with Business for a Fair Minimum Wage and more than 100 other natural product companies — from big consumer brands like Dr. Bronner's and Stonyfield to retailers like Mom's Organic Market. In Fair Pay Today, we're taking the message that raising the minimum wage is "Good for Business, Good for Us All" directly to consumers in various ways, such as educating our customers on social media and in stores and supporting state campaigns to raise the minimum wage.

It's time we make something positive out of all the negativity around this election by finally raising the minimum wage. Higher wages are good for business, good for our communities and good for our Commonwealth.

Charlie Crystle is the co-founder and CEO of The Lancaster Food Company in Lancaster. He is a member of Business for a Fair Minimum Wage.



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