



Innovation Focus Soup Kitchen Initiative

Journalist: Cardiff Bulgaria has won an Innovation Award in the Innov@ctions sustainable development category for the socially responsible project called Soup Kitchen. Ullrich Schubert as Head of territory in Bulgaria, can you present us this project?

Ullrich SCHUBERT: This origin of the idea comes from my experience as a volunteer of a large-scale Soup Kitchen Project, when I was heading BNP Paribas Chicago office in the late 80s. Remobilized the staff of BNP Paribas Sofia, we encouraged them to become a volunteer and even to contribute financially to this cost. The incentive was that every lev or euro given by one of our employees was doubled in a matching contribution. Each BNP Paribas visitor from Head Office was also given the opportunity to participate in this action. Like this, we gathered enough money to buy food for 150 people for a period of 4 months. Our staff rightfully refused to give the collected money to any institution, but suggested that we would be in control over the entire process from buying the food to the distribution. We even had to involve the mayor personally to overcome some of the administrative hurdles. And finally, we succeeded to launch our first Soup Kitchen campaign in winter 2002. After we received the award of the socially most responsible corporate from the Bulgarian business leader forum, we even got quite a number of spontaneous donations. This is how we got the number of daily meals from originally 150 to now 1750.

Journalist: what have been the effects of the Soup Kitchen settlement?

Ullrich SCHUBERT: One is the feel-good factor when you have a donation. And the other is obviously the reputation that you get. With this success, a feeling of collective ownership of the project occurred and it created a great team spirit and pride throughout our staff. This initiative has been carried by all the staff of BNP Paribas Sofia branch. It is clear that the award does not go to one single person but to everybody that has participated in this very successful initiative.

Journalist: Finally, what lesson did you learn from this adventure?

Ullrich SCHUBERT: Innovation starts always with a need. My recommendation is to identify third party benefits first. Obviously, for our clients, but also for the big challengers of society: employment, health, education, ageing of the population, minorities, management of the scarce natural resources and others. There are plenty of opportunities to create win-win situation where the bank benefits quite well. When it comes to generate ideas, there is only one suggestion which I have: think the unthinkable. And finally, during the implementation phase, follow the good old principle: say what you think, do what you say and live up to what you do. It works!

Journalist: Ullrich SCHUBERT, thank you.