

How To Make a Difference

Bright Green

An Interview with Robert J. Laikin,
Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer, Brightpoint, Inc.

EDITORS' NOTE Robert Laikin launched Brightpoint from its inception as Wholesale Cellular in 1989 to a multi-billion Fortune 500 global leader in the wireless handset distribution and customized logistics space. He is its Co-Founder and Director since August 1989, and has been Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer since January 1994. He was President of the company from June 1992 until September 1996 and Vice President and Treasurer from August 1989 until May 1992. From July 1986



Robert J. Laikin

to December 1987, he was Vice President, and from January 1988 to February 1993, he was President of Century Cellular Network, Inc. Laikin received his degree from Indiana University, where he currently serves on the Helene G. Simon Hillel Center, Indiana University Kelley School of Business Dean's Advisory Council, and Kelley School of Business Executive Board of the Johnson Center for Entrepreneurship & Innovation. He is a recipient of the Distinguished Entrepreneur Award by the Kelley School of Business Alumni Association (1999).

COMPANY BRIEF With operations in more than 25 countries and employing approximately 2,700 people worldwide, Brightpoint, Inc. (www.brightpoint.com) is a global leader in the distribution of wireless devices and in providing customized logistic services to the wireless industry. The company's innovative services include distribution, channel development, fulfillment, product customization, e-Business solutions, and other outsourced services that integrate seamlessly with its customers. Brightpoint's effective and efficient platform allows its customers to benefit from quickly deployed, flexible, and cost-effective solutions. Brightpoint was selected to be listed on the NASDAQ Global Select Market Index and won two Stevie Awards in 2007, is currently listed as one of Fortune's Most Admired Companies, and is included in the Fortune 500.

How much of a focus is it for you to drive the culture of corporate social responsibility throughout the organization?

Community involvement is one of the core values we emphasize to all Brightpoint associates throughout the world. Our values are: integrity, accomplishment, quality, respect, learning, and community involvement.

We promote community involvement as a

big part of our value set. While we can't tell our people that they have to be involved, we strongly encourage our employees to participate in different community opportunities. We also lead by example, so a lot of our executives around the world sit on nonprofit boards in their communities. We urge them to donate not only the company's resources – time or money – but also their personal resources.

We have been involved with the United Way campaign for several years and raised \$100,000 for them from our

U.S. employee base. Last year, our President of North America, Mark Howell, told the employees that if they raised \$70,000 in contributions, he would put his desk on the roof of the building and sleep up there. This year, he said if we raised a certain amount of money, he would walk 25 miles from his home to the office. So he walked to work, stopping along the way at different offices of United Way and other organizations that Brightpoint supported throughout the year. Both of these efforts were written about in the media throughout Indianapolis and the Midwest, and people who might have been on the fence about joining Brightpoint or about awarding business to us, saw that Brightpoint executives take dramatic actions and do innovative things to raise money for the community and decided in our favor.

When you look at that next generation of leaders for Brightpoint, are they looking for a company that has CSR as part of its values, and is it good for the business when it comes to attracting talent?

A lot of our new recruits ask about our green projects. One of our key drivers is a program called Bright Green, which was created by the employees. They brought it to the management team to point out that it's easy to talk about not using plastic bottles, but to have a company with a real green initiative takes a lot of commitment and change.

With Bright Green, we put a team of 15 key Brightpoint leaders from many levels of one of our organizations together to review our internal processes, identify environmentally friendly business practices, and to focus on conservation of resources and the reusability of materials in all areas of our business. This team came up with a lot of ideas that were implemented: recycling centers for the employees for paper

or plastic; a water filtration system that eliminated prepackaged water and plastic bottles; they discussed carpooling to save fuel; they put a message out about lights in the distribution centers to save energy; in North America, they developed a program that made us free of all Styrofoam containers; and we use all recycled paper for printing in the office. That is on top of the traditional recycling of cardboard, scrap metals, plastics, oils, and lubricants, which we've been doing for years.

People conformed to these programs within a little over a year, and they're happy about it. When we recruit new employees, they see the Bright Green project as a differentiator from other companies.

How critical has it been to maintain your emphasis on CSR during these challenging times?

When most companies face tough times, they spread the message from the top to cut costs in many areas. Because of this, many of the nonprofits that we have been supporting for more than 10 years were experiencing cutbacks from many past donors, so we felt now wasn't the time to pull back. We cut the company financial contributions a little bit, but in many cases we made sure we made up for it with personal contributions, additional time, or by figuring out ways to help those nonprofits raise money.

You have personally set time aside to be engaged in the community. How critical has it been to set the example at the top?

It's critical. I served on the Central Indiana Community Foundation for six years, and I'm on the board of Brebeuf Jesuit Prep School. I urge the senior leadership team to get out there and serve on nonprofit boards. When I get invited to a charity carnival, car wash, or auction dinner, it's important for the leadership team, including myself, to show up and participate. It's easy to send company-wide e-mails to talk about what you're supporting as a company, but getting out there and spending your own time is setting the example and showing your employees that you walk the walk. The senior team, whether it's at our corporate headquarters or in our North America division, all serve on nonprofit boards. If the leaders of our company serve on the boards, they learn more about the mission and the need, and they share it with employees who then get involved in the different projects and are excited about it. It's fun to give back. ●