

Christopher J. White

Cascade Engineering: Social Innovation at a Triple-Bottom-Line Plastics Manufacturer

Terrance Robinson, a young associate engineer at Cascade Engineering, sat on a folding chair on the factory floor, among the hundreds of employees attending a Cascade town hall meeting. Each year, Cascade's executives discussed the Grand Rapids, Michigan-based company's strategy with employees, explaining how each individual could positively impact the company's success. The atmosphere was festive as the company celebrated the successes of the previous year, answered employees' questions, and recognized its top-performing employees.

Cascade Engineering's president, Mark Miller, discussed the company's financial results, and executive vice president Kenyatta Brame discussed its social programs and B Corporation certification. Almost every slide, regardless of topic, displayed the stylized triangle of people, profit, and planet (see **Exhibit 1**).

The triangle symbolized the company's triple-bottom-line operating philosophy. Founder Fred Keller believed that business could — and should — pursue all three goals, not just financial performance. Keller pulled out and read a card that he kept in his wallet, a quote from theologian John Wesley:

“Do all the good you can
By all the means you can
In all the ways you can
In all the places you can
At all the times you can
To all the people you can
As long as ever you can.”

This was Robinson's first town hall meeting and his first year with Cascade Engineering. He had been hired as an associate engineer, tasked with providing estimates for new products and programs as well as for customer-specific orders or modifications to current projects. In his position, Robinson played a key liaison role among the sales, engineering, and manufacturing teams.

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