CEOs on a Mission
Communicating Responsible Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Series Editor: Donnalyn Pompper

This Communicating Responsible Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion series brings together leading scholars of public relations, communication management, (corporate) social responsibility, sustainability, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Together, we offer critique and map new arenas for discovery in an effort to advance a collective goal of eliminating bias/discrimination from organizations and other public spaces. Simultaneously, we amplify the virtues of equality and respect among humans and for all species.

Despite nearly two decades of public relations theory building and formal study about the importance of DEI, numbers of public relations practitioners who are not male or Caucasian/White have not grown in meaningful ways and research directions seem to have hit a wall. Examining public relations as a “responsibility” provides new avenues for critiquing ways power operates in and through public relations work. This proposed series will add a much-needed contribution to global understanding of intersections among DEI with social responsibility to enable public relations practitioners and organizations (corporations and non-profits) to take lip service to the next level. To be authentic, DEI must be a component of social responsibility and sustainability. And the public relations practitioner, as insider-activist and ethics guardian, is the logical point person to infuse DEI-thinking in policies, decision-making, and everyday life throughout organizations.

Volumes in this series:
Public Relations for Social Responsibility – Edited by Donnalyn Pompper
Praise for *CEOs on a Mission*

Eric’s approach to understanding activism is to build what social scientists call a “process model.” This means that he approaches CEO activism not as a static role or a category, but as a process that unfolds over time and evolves as external stakeholders react to a CEO’s words and actions. Eric digs into his interviews to smoke out the motives that drive some CEOs to activism, to explain how they chose the issues and causes for their advocacy, to spell out the tactics and safeguards they employed, and to reflect on activism’s consequences for society, companies, and CEOs themselves.

In an era roiled by acronyms that include CSR (corporate social responsibility), DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion), and ESG (environmental, social, and governance factors), this book is an eye-opener. For executives, it presents a model for those who want to undertake activism or understand colleagues that do. For academics, it affords insights into the antecedents, dynamics, and consequences of CEO activism, informed by Eric’s postmodern perspective. For everyone, *CEOs on a Mission* provides a good read.

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CEOs on a Mission: Reimagining CEO Activism, Development, and Difference

BY

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This book is dedicated to God Almighty; It is in loving memory of my father Victor Kwaku Adae; to my children, and to yours.
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## List of Abbreviations

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<tr>
<td>1D1F</td>
<td>One District, One Factory (Program of Ghana)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGITPROP</td>
<td>Agitation and Propaganda (tactics)</td>
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<tr>
<td>AIDS</td>
<td>Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome</td>
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<td>BA</td>
<td>Brand Activism</td>
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<td>BR</td>
<td>Brand Responsibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer</td>
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<td>CIA</td>
<td>Central Intelligence Agency</td>
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<td>CPA</td>
<td>Corporate Political Activity</td>
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<td>CPP</td>
<td>Convention People’s Party</td>
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<td>CSA</td>
<td>Corporate Social Advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSE</td>
<td>Comprehensive Sexuality Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSR</td>
<td>Corporate Social Responsibility</td>
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<td>DEI</td>
<td>Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity</td>
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<td>ECOWAS</td>
<td>Economic Community of West African States</td>
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<tr>
<td>EI</td>
<td>Executive Instrument</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESG</td>
<td>Environmental, Social, and Governance</td>
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<tr>
<td>EWN</td>
<td>Executive Women Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>GAB</td>
<td>Ghana Association of Bankers</td>
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<tr>
<td>GCBOD</td>
<td>Ghana Chamber of Bulk Oil Distributors</td>
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<tr>
<td>HIV</td>
<td>Human Immunodeficiency Virus</td>
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<tr>
<td>IEA</td>
<td>Institute of Economic Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>IFC</td>
<td>International Finance Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>MoGCSP</td>
<td>Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection</td>
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<td>NCA</td>
<td>National Communication Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>NDC</td>
<td>National Democratic Congress</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGP</td>
<td>National Gender Policy</td>
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<td>NPP</td>
<td>New Patriotic Party</td>
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<td>NRC</td>
<td>National Redemption Party</td>
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<td>PCSR</td>
<td>Political Corporate Social Responsibility</td>
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PRSA  Public Relations Society of America
SYPALA  Students and Young Professionals African Liberty Academy
TBL  Triple Bottom Line
TEF  Tony Elumelu Foundation
TIN  Tax Identification Number
UBA  United Bank for Africa
About the Author

**Eric Kwame Adae, PhD**, is an Assistant Professor of Public Relations at Drake University School of Journalism and Mass Communication. He earned his doctorate degree in Media and Communication Studies from the University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication. He is from Ghana in West Africa, where he earned undergraduate and master’s degrees from the University of Ghana. He is an accredited public relations practitioner and was a communications consultant for over 15 years in Ghana. He has presented at various academic and professional conferences, including the National Communication Association (NCA), the International Communication Association (ICA), the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), and the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). He was named the Public Relations Professional of the Year (2021) by the Public Relations Society of America Iowa Chapter. In 2021, he and Professor Donnalyn Pompper won the Doug Newsom Award of the AEJMC PR Division with their paper, “PR & Sustainability across the African Continent: Using Afro-Centric Philosophies to Remember What’s Been ‘Forgotten or Lost’.” His research interests include responsible management, corporate social advocacy, corporate social responsibility, sustainability, critical public relations, and Afrocentricity.

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Foreword

In 2020, a study by the Zeno Group (a division of the Public Relations firm Daniel J. Edelman) published a global research report regarding the role of business in society. This study was influenced by the notion that in today’s society, many people have lost trust in the traditional institutions that they regularly rely on, including government, the media, and educational institutions. The global pandemic of 2020 and 2021 did little to change these perceptions. As a result, many people now choose to look to business and to the brands produced by companies to address problems that traditional institutions no longer seem capable of addressing. The Zeno Group’s study found that people definitely believe that corporations can be responsible, with the term responsible defined as caring as much about society as they do about profits. When people think a business is responsible, they are four times more likely to purchase the brand and recommend the company. These consumers are also six times more likely to protect the company from public criticism, if any criticism is to be had.

Corporate leaders themselves are aware of the power that business has to address key problems in society. WPP is a British-based international communications holding company, focused on “building better futures for our people, planet, clients, and communities” (WPP.org, 2023). As one of the first companies to publish its own sustainability report, the company is highly invested in addressing their “work, marketing standards, employment, supply chain, and social investment.” WPP’s CEO Sir Martin Sorrell offered a strong endorsement for the industry and his company tackling key societal problems, saying:

Yet the big problems that our society faces – those of inequality, unemployment, health crises, water scarcity and climate change – remain far from being resolved. While technology holds the key to tackling some of these problems, it is also exacerbating others. Demographic shifts and the exponential growth of the global middle class look set to further strain our planet’s limited resources. I am often asked what the role of business should be in tackling such complex issues. My view is that it has a critical role to play. Indeed, these challenges cannot be addressed without the participation of global business, as a driver of growth and creator of jobs and a force for innovation. In partnership with governments and civil society, business will create many of the solutions we will need over the coming decades. It is in the interests
of business to play its full part. It must do so if it wants to secure future supplies of natural resources, to build skills and to help create strong communities that enable business to prosper. (WPP Group, 2014, p. 2)

Sorrell highlighted the need and opportunity for businesses around the world to create social justice solutions to societal problems, and used his corporate sustainability report to begin to document efforts that his own company had undertaken. He ended by proposing that WPP will help brands embed sustainability into their life cycles, as his firm could provide the specialist knowledge and skills to do so. The firm went on to develop activist work on several brands owned by global giant Unilever, addressing education (with the cleaning brand Persil), beauty standards (for the beauty brand Dove), rural sanitation (for a disinfectant brand called Domestos), and rainwater harvesting (for telecommunications company Vodafone) (Sheehan & Morrison, 2018). While no longer leading the company, Sorrell’s influence on activist communication is undeniable.

Every company, though, does not have the resources to create global communication campaigns to address social issues. And when companies want to engage, many do not know where to start. In today’s chaotic society, the opportunity for corporate and brand activism is great: Pimentel and Didonet (2021) developed a typology that identified a range of areas that companies could address with various types of activism. The first area defined is social activism, where the firm addresses issues such as gender, equality, race, and education. The next area is legal activism, where firms are involved in workplace issues, employment laws, and issues regarding taxation. A third area, business activism, includes addressing CEO pay and worker compensation. The fourth area, economic activism, involves inequality and the redistribution of wealth, while political activism addresses lobbying and voting rights. Finally, environment activism addresses key issues facing the planet, such as global warming, conservation, land use, and pollution.

Corporate activism and society’s call to action to address key social issues must be answered by someone in a place of responsibility in a firm. This individual must be capable of embracing and modeling notions of brand activism. As this book will discuss, the CEO occupies a natural position to create a level of activism in the company.

Penn State Smeal Business School professor Donald Hambrick, interviewed for the school’s alumni magazine, defined CEO activism as when CEOs speak out on societal debates that have little direct bearing on near-term company performance. Hambrick characterized CEO activism as “a relatively recent, rapidly mounting, and controversial phenomenon. Many observers assume that CEO activism accomplishes very little, while some believe that it’s downright risky” (Manno, 2022).

As this book will show, CEOs have a range of responsibilities to shareholders, employees, consumers, and more. Driving these responsibilities of an activist CEO are several key responsibilities to an activist agenda, as outlined by Pimentel and Didonet (2021). These include:
• Environmental responsibilities: making sure the planet exists so the brand can thrive
• Economic responsibilities: strengthening economies by providing jobs
• Public health responsibilities: determining how brands affect people on the physical, emotional, and psychological levels, potentially influencing deep cultural change

Balancing the range of responsibilities and shareholders is at the heart of creating a strong and activist company, and this book will highlight how activist CEOs create and maintain this balance.

Importantly, an activist CEO must have a long-term perspective toward the business. Short-term corporate profits can sometimes grow through unethical and irresponsible means (Carruci, 2016). An activist agenda, though, must be in place for the long term, as doing the right thing may cost a bit more than purely serving the bottom line. However, a commitment to being an activist brand has the potential to build equity in a company that will withstand the test of time.

In this book, Eric Kwame Adae has identified key CEOs that have built strong businesses by being activist CEOs and has probed their perspectives, strategies, and challenges of choosing this method of corporate leadership. He identifies how they create long-term customer loyalty, legal compliance, and strong brand reputations that have led their companies to success. He also articulates the key challenges that CEOs face in this mission. Most importantly, the book shows the role that national and global culture plays in brand activism. Grounded in key theories and enlivened by CEO insights, this book provides a critical and cultural roadmap for any CEO seeking to adopt an activist agenda.

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Foreword


WPP.org. (2023). We are the creative transformation company. https://www.wpp.com/about

Acknowledgments

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Abba Father, You are faithful! Thank you for all the blessings. Holy Spirit, thank You for being my ever-present help in times of need. Thank You, dear Lord Jesus Christ. May Your name be praised forevermore. Selah!