

CEO Activism in 2018

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Weber Shandwick and KRC Research recently released their third annual report measuring American attitudes and expectations toward CEOs speaking publicly about policy issues called CEO Activism in 2018: The Purposeful CEO.

The study surveyed 1,006 adults in the United States online. It explained the concept of CEO activism with the following:

"In the past year or so, some chief executive officers (CEOs, or top leaders of companies) have spoken out publicly and taken a stand on controversial issues. For example, CEOs have spoken up about social, political and environmental issues such as climate change, gender pay equity, same-sex marriage, immigration, gun control and discrimination."

Key takeaways:

- Awareness and favorability of CEO activism has risen
- Americans believe that CEO activism is having a growing impact on governmental policy
- If they choose to speak, CEOs should address issues important to the American consumer or important to their company's values.

Awareness and perceived influence of CEO activists is rising

Compared to results of the previous two surveys, American consumers who participated in the 2018 study were more likely to have read or heard about CEO activism and believe in its ability to impact society.

By the numbers:

- 42 percent of Americans are aware of CEO activism
- 38 percent think favorably about CEO activists
- 48 percent believe CEO activism impacts government public policy action
- 46 percent of Americans believe that more CEOs will become CEO activists over the next few years

Should CEOs speak out?

America is almost evenly split about whether CEOs have a responsibility to speak out about social issues. When it comes to political party lines, Democrats are more likely than Republicans or Independents to think that companies should take positions on "social issues that they consider important to their workforce and to society," regardless of relevance to their business.

By the numbers:

- 39 percent of Americans believe that CEOs have a responsibility to speak out
- 42 percent believe that CEOs do not have a responsibility to speak out
- 64 percent of Democrats think companies should take positions on social issues
- 68 percent of Republicans think companies should not take positions on social issues

What CEOs should be speaking about

If focusing on a specific issue, Americans think that CEOs should speak about job and skills training, equal pay or sexual harassment. Seventy-seven percent said that CEOs should speak in defense of their company's values, though women were significantly more likely than men to take this position.

By the numbers:

- 80 percent of Americans believe that CEOs should express an opinion about job and skills training
- 79 percent believe they should address equal pay in the workforce
- 77 percent want CEOs to speak about sexual harassment
- 81 percent of women believe CEOs should publicly defend their company's values, and 74 percent of men believe this

Benefits of CEO activism

CEO activism can effectively guide consumers toward taking action. It can also work to improve employee loyalty.

By the numbers:

- 42 percent of Americans aware of CEO activism have taken action in response to a CEO's stance on an issue, usually in the form of boycotting (35 percent)
- 46 percent said they would be more likely to purchase from a company whose CEO has taken a stance on an issue that they agree with
- 31 percent of employed Americans would be more loyal to their organization in response to their CEO taking a public stance on an issue

The study appears courtesy of Weber Shandwick and KRC Research. To read the full study, please visit: https://www.webershandwick.com/news/ceo-activism-in-2018-half-of-americans-say-ceo-activism-influences-government/.

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