

2.13: Closing Company Case

Blue Zones

When adventurer Dan Buettner set off around the world, riding his bike and visiting far-off destinations, he put a way of living into motion. By studying various communities around the world, Dan discovered pockets where populations of older people seemed to be living longer than anywhere else on earth. There were five such places where people lived a very long time and were healthier than many of the world's people. Dan called these places "Blue Zones." The Blue Zones included Okinawa, Japan; Sardinia, Italy; Nicoya, Costa Rica; Ikaria, Greece; and Loma Linda, California.

The Blue Zone concept grew and developed through the work of Gianni Pes and Michel Poulain. They originally identified Sardinia as a part of the world where there was a high concentration of older men. As the two began mapping the regions of longevity, they highlighted the villages and termed the inner circle of the "Blue Zones."

"Dan and the team of demographers and researchers found that all blue zone areas share nine specific lifestyle habits that they call the Power 9" (Blue Zones, 2024).

The Blue Zones became a New York Times bestseller. Media attention followed, and soon interest increased in the lifestyles within the Blue Zones. People began to recognize the Blue Zones as the happiest places to live. Communities were looking for ways to emulate the lifestyles and successes of these regions and, in turn, boost their own longevity.

Dan realized he had not only a business but a mission. What would happen if Blue Zones were created around the world? What if every community became a Blue Zone and a happy and healthy place where people lived longer? Could chronic disease be eradicated? Would health care costs drop?

In 2009, Albert Lea, Minnesota, teamed up with Blue Zones by applying the same concepts seen in the other Blue Zone locations. The location was suffering a severe economic crisis and needed a strategy to get out of it (Blue Zones, 2019).

What do these communities get for signing on to be a structured Blue Zone? Lower obesity rates, smoking cessation, increased exercise among their populations, reduced health care expenses, and a happier and more productive community. The initiatives are incredibly effective at changing how people live, work, and play. The Blue Zones project is population health at work. Adopting Blue Zones creates a culture and community of complete well-being—one in which people's productivity increases because of less illness.

Creating these communities includes a phased approach. Blue Zones starts with Phases I and II, which build the foundation. Assessment and an understanding of the current and desired future states enable identification of gaps and issues. After the plan is drawn, in Phase III a full transformation takes place that encompasses the people, the places, and the policy. When the plan is fully accepted and implemented, people will enjoy longevity, lower healthcare costs, and the recognition that the community is a great place to live and work.

How does the Blue Zones process work for the communities that participate? The effort is a collaboration between the community and the Blue Zones team. Starting with a complete evaluation of the community, Blue Zones experts work with community leaders and residents to assess the current state of well-being. Understanding the challenges currently facing the community provides the team with the greatest opportunity to develop the opportunities that will transform the community.

The statistics speak for themselves. Now, communities across the United States are working to find ways to combat the crippling effects of the nation's healthcare crisis. Blue Zones could be the answer. "The Blue Zones Project helped our community set amazing, aggressive, and achievable strategies that moved the Public Health agenda further in 10 months than what I could have expected in 10 years," said Lois Ahern, director of Freeborn County Health (retired), in Albert Lea (Blue Zones, 2024).

Case Questions

1. What are the mission and purpose of Blue Zones?
2. Marketers use strategies such as market penetration, market development, product development, and diversification. What is the optimal strategy for Blue Zones to pursue to gain a foothold in the United States?
3. What are the market segmentation and target market for Blue Zones?
4. Blue Zones works to create healthier communities. With this goal in mind, what are some of the KPIs Blue Zones might work to implement?

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