

# Top 10 Insights

## From the 2025 Corporate Responsibility Summit: “Accelerating Impact Through People, Policies, and Purpose”



Held approximately 100 days into the new U.S. presidential administration, The Conference Board 2025 Corporate Responsibility Summit brought together nearly 270 global leaders in corporate sustainability, citizenship, and governance in New York City on April 24–25. Over two days, the summit explored how companies can navigate today’s rapidly evolving regulatory and cultural landscape – and accelerate long-term impact for future generations. Below are ten key takeaways from the event along with quotes from participants.

### KEY INSIGHTS

1

#### **While navigating political changes, stay true to your core values.**

As companies adapt to the rapidly shifting regulatory environment, success will come from balancing strategic alignment with authenticity. From global positioning to state-level engagement, corporate responsibility leaders should stay attuned to how changes in government policy, regulation, and public sentiment may impact their operations – especially in areas like supply chain, facilities, and workforce. But by remaining grounded in the values that define their brand, companies can remain resilient, credible, and future-ready.

*“You’ve got to lean into your values. You’ve got to do what’s authentic to the company, to the culture, to the brand – regardless of all these other things.”*

2

#### **Don’t confuse a shift in rhetoric with a shift in risk.**

Political headwinds may change the language around environmental, social and governance (ESG) issues, but the underlying risks – climate, human rights, regulatory, and reputational – are only intensifying.

*“Pulling back may seem safe, but it can make you a target from two sides ... and lead to reputational damage or even litigation risk.”*

3

#### **Upholding the rule of law is critical for economic prosperity.**

Global adherence to the rule of law is being challenged but leaders across the political spectrum agree: Safeguarding the institutions and legal frameworks that uphold the rule of law is key to long-term prosperity and business confidence.

*“Sound rule of law is foundational for strong economic growth and rising per capita incomes. ... From a business perspective, the rule of law is important. If you look at economic data ... the more important it becomes.”*

**4 Sustainability drives return on investment (ROI) – but only when it’s done strategically.**

Corporate responsibility initiatives can significantly enhance financial performance and shareholder value, but only if they are deeply integrated, stakeholder-informed, and aligned with core business key performance indicators (KPIs). Amid economic uncertainty and cost pressures, companies must treat sustainability as a strategic growth driver – not a side initiative.

*“Corporate responsibility drives competitive value, but only when it is done well. ... Building that trust and engaging with those stakeholders is an uplift and a driver of financial and competitive value.”*

**5 Intentional sustainability reporting builds credibility and strategic alignment.**

Effective sustainability disclosure hinges not just on what is shared, but how and why it’s shared. By aligning reporting with core sustainability strategy, leveraging relevant frameworks, and establishing structured internal processes, organizations can ensure sustainability data is meaningful to stakeholders.

*“Any data point we report on ... must be supported by its own standard operating procedure and the right risk and control framework. This helps us make sure that the information we’re putting out is accurate, reliable, and can be repeated year after year.”*

**6 Boards are cementing sustainability into core governance and strategy.**

Sustainability and corporate responsibility are no longer peripheral topics in the boardroom – boards increasingly expect to see sustainability embedded into corporate strategy, with clear metrics and accountability linked to long-term performance.

*“From a board perspective, what we’re looking for is really aspects around an ESG strategy that will serve to mitigate risk – but also to drive value.”*

**7 Integrating sustainability into strategy requires ownership, focus – and smarter use of data.**

Embedding sustainability into core strategy goes beyond setting aspirational goals; it calls for enterprise-wide ownership, disciplined focus on material topics, and using data not just for compliance, but as a lever for driving impact and competitive advantage.

*“We often feel that we’re working for the data, the data isn’t working for us. ... But data is proof of your story. It’s the power you have in your organization to effect change.”*



### 8 Purpose-led innovation can turn constraints into strategic opportunities.

In moments of disruption or budget cuts, resilience doesn't always mean pushing harder – it can mean stepping back, reassessing, and infusing purpose into unexpected places. Mission-driven teams can sustain impact even in lean times.

*“Instead of advocating, we chose to innovate. ... We figured out a way to embed purpose in the infrastructure of some of what was already happening.”*

### 9 Strategic philanthropy requires local insight, cross-functional alignment – and trust.

As companies navigate rising social needs, budget constraints, and global-local tensions, the most effective philanthropy aligns with core business goals, adapts to community realities, and is built on trust-based partnerships.

*“If you're going to do the due diligence, then trust that they know what they're doing – and allow them the autonomy and the agency to be able to do it.”*

### 10 True resilience starts with leadership and long-term thinking.

Resilience isn't just about reacting faster – it's about embedding long-term thinking, cross-functional risk management, and values-driven leadership into the business. This includes proactive scenario planning, strong enterprise risk oversight, and visible commitment from the C-Suite and board. Organizations with resilience at their core not only weather disruption – they are positioned to outperform in the long run.

*“When you have tone from the top ... not just regulatory compliance, but a culture of ethics, stakeholder inclusion, and innovation – you create a cycle of organizational resilience.”*