Ten professional development benefits of volunteering

By Merrill Associates

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_Congratulations!_
_Today is your day._
_You're off to Great Places!_
_You're off and away!_
_You have brains in your head._
_You have feet in your shoes._
_You can steer yourself any direction you choose._
_You're on your own. And you know what you know._
_OH! THE PLACES YOU'LL GO!_

--(Dr. Seuss, 1990)

If you are looking for ways to enhance your career, or if you are looking for ways to attract volunteers, consider the following benefits:

1. Volunteering offers incredible networking opportunities. Volunteering in your community allows you to meet new people, including community leaders. You don't have to join a club or attend meetings. You can volunteer at a time that fits your schedule. You not only develop life long personal and professional relationships (friends), you can also hear about job openings, gather insider employment information and develop great references.

2. Volunteering helps you retain and sharpen old skills. Sometimes job duties change and you may no longer be doing things you used to do, and liked. Volunteering is a perfect venue for keeping those skills sharp and current.

3. Volunteering is the perfect place to develop new skills. Employers are often seeking well-rounded individuals who have good teamwork and goal setting skills. Serving on a volunteer committee or board is a great way to learn group dynamics and teamwork.

4. Volunteering offers opportunities to practice skills in a relatively risk free environment. It is much more effective to practice a skill than to read about it or study it in a classroom.

5. Volunteering can help you expand your horizons and explore new career options. Demographics are changing rapidly in our society and volunteering is a great way to enhance cultural awareness. Group work not only fosters teamwork, but also offers opportunities to learn more about different perspectives.
6. Volunteering gives you the satisfaction of knowing you are doing good and being involved in your community. If you feel strongly about something that is happening or not happening in your community, get involved. Get others to join with you and craft new solutions to community problems.

7. Volunteering gives you visibility. Volunteer work can indeed expose you to a wide range of people, including many strong, influential community leaders.

8. Volunteering can be energizing/renewing. Sometimes we simply need a break in our routine, or an opportunity to create a balance in our lives. That energy and sense of fulfillment can carry over to a work situation and sometimes helps to relieve work tensions and foster new perspectives for old situations.

9. Volunteering can create leaders. By watching those around you, you can begin to identify the qualities of leadership that you most admire and you can develop those qualities in yourself. Working in volunteer settings will help you learn strategic thinking, change management and conflict resolution skills. You will learn about your community, about trends and issues, about people and about resources. All of which can help you develop your leadership potential.

10. Volunteering demonstrates workplace skills/management skills/customer service skills/leadership skills that can be documented in a resume. Volunteer work support skills, character and balance in life. 90% of executives in a national survey of Fortune 500 companies believed volunteering built teamwork and provided valuable professional development opportunities.

Life is a wonderful journey and you never know where it will take you. Volunteering can help you be more than a passive traveler. You can make a plan and actively build skills to enhance your professional lives. No fees and no tuition. A commitment of time and energy and you are on your way.

Get mixed up, of course,
as you already know.
You’ll get mixed up
with many strange birds as you go.
So be sure when you step.
Step with care and great tact
and remember that Life’s
a Great Balancing Act.

And will you succeed?
Yes! You will indeed!
(98 and ¾ percent guaranteed)
So...get on your way!
(Dr. Seuss, 1990)

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