



Corporate Volunteering - Developing your workforce and strengthening the team

Developing employees through volunteering

We know it is not only important, but essential to invest in the skills and development of our employees as on-going training improves employee performance and helps an organisation to advance. Employee growth is critical if a business is to stay ahead of changing market demands.

Traditionally, organisations pursue employee development through a combination of in-house training programmes, education reimbursement, external courses and on-the-job learning. Many of these training options focus on hard skills like technical aptitude, report writing, IT or finance. Perhaps not so prominent are the training options that build soft skills - things like teambuilding, conflict resolution and creating consensus.

That's where employee volunteering can make such a difference. By contributing time and talents to the community, employees gain learning opportunities that may not be readily available to them within the organisation. By applying their skills to a new set of challenges (often completely different from those in the corporate environment) employees stretch their creative problem-solving skills. What's more, employees are challenged interpersonally as they collaborate with new circles of people such as those who work for charities or nonprofits as well as their clients and volunteers.

For the companies that sponsor employee volunteer efforts, the benefits are manifold. Not only does the company gain a better-developed workforce, it receives a whole host of extrinsic benefits that come from supporting the community.

In this Blue Paper we'll take a look at the business case for employee training through volunteering. Plus, we'll talk about how to evaluate whether your volunteer programme is making a measurable difference in employee skills development.

It's a win-win-win

Employee volunteer programmes can be one of those rare situations in which every party can benefit. Charitable organisations and not for profit organisations, of course, gain volunteer labour and access to special skills like marketing, IT, finance and HR advisory services. For nonprofits, this specialised manpower is



a critical part of keeping their operating budgets low, allowing them to use donations for direct client services, not overhead.

But nonprofits gain more than just free IT support out of the deal. For many, the interaction with corporate volunteers provides a positive infusion of corporate culture that can really impact the organisation's success.

For the employee, volunteering can lead to increased job satisfaction, connection with the community, an increased sense of personal health and wellbeing,¹ in addition to leadership and skills development. One recent study of corporate volunteerism in the UK found that while most employees are motivated to volunteer because it contributes to the community, a significant number were also driven by personal motivations: 37% cited the desire to do something different from their traditional work role while 25% said they were motivated by the opportunity to develop new skills.²

For businesses, corporate volunteer programmes are great for PR, providing recognition and enhanced reputation within the community. That reputation can contribute to better sales. In fact, 86% of Americans have previously said they'd be likely to switch from one brand to another of the same price and quality if the other brand was associated with a social or community cause.³



As for employee engagement, research shows that volunteering helps businesses enhance their recruitment and retention rates and that it improves employee morale, loyalty and productivity, too.⁴ According to the 2011 Volunteer Impact Survey from Deloitte, nearly two-thirds of Millennial-age employees (those born after 1980) say they would rather work for a company that provides opportunities to volunteer.⁵

Notably, survey data from another Deloitte study identified 'lack of career progress' as a top reason employees look for new jobs. Analysts in the Deloitte report advise companies to incorporate skilled volunteerism into their training

¹ Volunteering – The Business Case. Rep. Corporate Citizenship, May 2010. <http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/business/economic-research-and-information/research-publications/Documents/research-2010/Volunteering-The%20Business%20Case.pdf>

² Volunteering – The Business Case. Rep. Corporate Citizenship, May 2010. <http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/business/economic-research-and-information/research-publications/Documents/research-2010/Volunteering-The%20Business%20Case.pdf>

³ Cone Corporate Citizenship Study quoted via <http://www.chicagosfoodbank.org/site/PageNavigator/why-partner.html>.

⁴ A Billion + Change. A Billion + Change Set to Mobilize Billions in Skills-Based Volunteer Services from Businesses. 3 Nov. 2011. <http://www.pointsoflight.org/press-releases/billion-change-set-mobilize-billions-skills-based-volunteer-services-businesses>

⁵ 2011 Deloitte Volunteer Impact Survey. Deloitte http://www.deloitte.com/assets/Dcom-UnitedStates/Local%20Assets/Documents/us_2011DeloitteVolunteerIMPACTSurvey_ataglance_060311.pdf

and development programmes saying, 'Skilled volunteer engagements could provide valuable experiential learning opportunities that respond to [employee] appetites for professional development, leadership roles and stimulating and rewarding work.'⁶

More than logging numbers

Review many annual reports that detail corporate volunteering and you will find that total number of hours logged, pounds raised for charity and breadth of organisation with which took part. While the data looks impressive (and it is), the fact is that many companies satisfy their community volunteering goals with one-day projects in which employees descend upon work-sites to spend the day painting, planting trees, picking up rubbish, and engaging in other activities with community agencies prepared to absorb the sporadic influx of volunteers.

While there is certainly value in employee engagement in all of these activities - benefit to community, team-building, enhancement of corporate standing in and connection with the community, and satisfied volunteers who feel good about themselves and their employers - these volunteer experiences do not provide the conditions necessary for enhanced learning to occur. One-day work assignments like these fall short of translating into enhanced employee skills and competencies.

What really aids employee development is pro bono work or skills-based volunteering.

The Points of Light Foundation, the world's largest organisation dedicated to volunteer services with affiliates in 250 cities across 20 countries, defines skills-based volunteering as volunteer work 'that uses technical or professional skills' to benefit nonprofits or community causes. This might mean writing, IT, legal, accounting, graphic design, welding or other workplace skills. Points of Light distinguishes this work from 'extra-pair-of-hands' volunteering - such as painting, playground cleanup, serving meals or selling raffle tickets - in which no specific skills are required.⁷

But can skills-based volunteering really build employee skills? Ask many dedicated

⁶ 2011 Deloitte Volunteer Impact Survey." Deloitte http://www.deloitte.com/assets/Dcom-UnitedStates/Local%20Assets/Documents/us_2011DeloitteVolunteerIMPACTSurvey_ataglance_060311.pdf

⁷ The Promise Employee Skill-Based Volunteering Holds for Employee Skills and Nonprofit Partner Effectiveness. Points of Light Foundation, July 2007. http://www.handsonnetwork.org/files/resources/files_resources_POLresearchSBV_July2007.pdf



volunteers and HR managers, and they'll tell you that 'yes', volunteering really can make an educational difference.

"Volunteering intellectual capital and professional insights to a nonprofit is effective because of the authenticity of the work," said Anne Taylor, vice chairman and regional managing partner of Deloitte. "Adults often develop new capabilities through 'action learning,' which includes challenging assignments, shared experiences and role models. What better leadership laboratory than a nonprofit that needs sophisticated business advice, coupled with a high-potential employee with a passion for a cause?"⁸

Jennifer Benz, a US marketing and communications consultant says work carried out pro bono (for free) helped advance her career. "My pro bono work led to interactions with senior colleagues that I never would have met through my day-to-day work," she says. "I found a mentor in a senior-level leader and gained experience on strategic projects that were well beyond my job description at the time."⁹ And what's more according to Sheffield Volunteer Centre 41% of people questioned for a government poll reported that volunteering had helped them to gain paid employment while 88% of people out of work but looking for a job believed that volunteering has a positive effect on their job prospects.¹⁰



Bill McDonald, chief marketing officer for Capital One Financial Corporation, remembers taking on a volunteer assignment when he himself was a young professional. "I had just moved to a new city and wanted to meet people," he said. Today, as a corporate leader, he invests staff resources in supporting employee volunteering. "At Capital One, we recognise that making pro bono work possible is an investment back in our associates," he says. "I want our employees doing pro bono work to say – 'I grew; I had fun; I made a difference.'"¹¹

For younger employees or others who are still relatively new to their technical area, skills-based volunteering can be a way to strengthen those emerging 'hard' skills by applying them to different kinds of problems. But as we said at the outset, skills-based volunteering also provides employees with the opportunity to

⁸ Qaddumi, Thora. "Skills-based Volunteer Programs Benefit Both Sides of Equation - Houston Business Journal." *Business News - The Business Journals*. 29 June 2008. <http://www.bizjournals.com/houston/stories/2008/06/30/focus9.html?page=2>

⁹ Jen's Life in the Pro Bono Movement. Taproot Foundation. <http://www.taprootfoundation.org/do-probono/individualscase-studies/jens-life-pro-bono-movement>

¹⁰ Volunteer Centre Sheffield http://www.sheffieldvolunteercentre.org.uk/UserFiles/File/Volunteering_to_paid_employment_what_we_say_to_unemployed_clients.pdf

¹¹ Interview with Bill McDonald. Taproot Foundation. <http://www.taprootfoundation.org/support-probono/build-movement/marketing/interview-bill-mcdonald>

build soft skills, which tend to be more interpersonal in nature.

In a volunteering report commissioned by the City of London, employees and their managers frequently reported that volunteering helped them develop the following soft skills: influencing and negotiation, communicating, team work, adaptability, leadership, planning and organisation, relationship and network building and problem solving.¹² Your employees are also likely to expand their world-view and cultural competencies. Indeed, respondents to Corporate Development Solutions' International Corporate Volunteerism survey listed 'understanding new markets and learning about customer behaviour' as one of the top five benefits of their involvement in international corporate volunteerism.¹³

The right kind of experience

So the argument is that it takes the right kind of volunteering to translate into employee learning. But what does that really entail?

"The company needs to determine which skills can be enhanced by volunteer service (such as negotiating, delegating or motivating others), which volunteer opportunities can help deliver results (such as nonprofit board service or pro bono work) and how the outcomes can effectively be measured, just as with other training investments," says Deloitte's Anne Taylor.¹⁴

Several studies have been conducted to determine what elements of an employee volunteering programme are necessary for successful skill development. The Points of Light Foundation recommends the following elements for volunteerism-based employee development:¹⁵

A team-based approach.

Even if you aren't assigning a whole team to a volunteer project, encourage your employees to seek internal organisational support. When Jennifer Benz signed on for her human resources project, her company allowed her to recruit a team of consultants from across the organisation. That gave her the opportunity to



¹² Volunteering – The Business Case. Rep. Corporate Citizenship, May 2010. <http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/business/economic-research-and-information/research-publications/Documents/research-2010/Volunteering-The%20Business%20Case.pdf>

¹³ CDC Development Solutions. <http://www.cdcdevelopmentsolutions.org/corporate-volunteerism>

¹⁴ Qaddumi, Thora. "Skills-based Volunteer Programs Benefit Both Sides of Equation - Houston Business Journal." BusinessNews - The Business Journals. 29 June 2008. <http://www.bizjournals.com/houston/stories/2008/06/30/focus9.html?page=2>

¹⁵ The Promise Employee Skill-Based Volunteering Holds for Employee Skills and Nonprofit Partner Effectiveness. Points of Light Foundation, July 2007. http://www.handsonnetwork.org/files/resources/files_resources_POLiresearchSBV_July2007.pdf

interact with senior leaders and build internal mentorship relationships.

Effective support.

To be successful, employees need support from both their employer and the nonprofit partner. Build manager support for your volunteer programme by communicating the bottom-line benefits and skill development opportunities. Communicate that corporate volunteering is sanctioned from the top. But before embarking on any new project, have a conversation with nonprofit leadership as well, and determine what resources they are able to commit. If your employees need access to data, for example, and nonprofit staff are too overburdened to provide it, the project could be compromised from the beginning.

Adequate financial resources.

Financial issues should also be addressed at the beginning of any project. Does the nonprofit organisation have funds to see the project through to completion? To maintain the project long-term? In some instances a company can use its professional connections to recruit other pro bono contributors or negotiate reduced rates with its own suppliers in order to complete a larger-scale project. However the project will be funded, make sure the expectations are laid out right from the beginning.



A robust evaluation process.

Measurement includes making sure your efforts made a real difference for the nonprofit and making sure that company resources were put to good use. Set some goals at the outset and decide how you will measure results and determine if the project was successful - for everyone involved.

Full-compliance with adult learner theory.

Developed back in the 1970s, adult learner theory suggests that adults need the following condition for optimal learning:

- Involvement in the planning and evaluation of their instruction
- Relevance of the content area to their job or personal life
- Experiential activities
- Problem-centred rather than content-centred emphasis.¹⁶

When it comes to adult learning, it's not hard to see how skills-based volunteering can meet all or most of the above criteria. Imagine an IT technician, a writer, or an accountant, for example. When they volunteer for a nonprofit, they often serve

¹⁶ *The Promise Employee Skill-Based Volunteering Holds for Employee Skills and Nonprofit Partner Effectiveness.* Points of Light Foundation, July 2007. http://www.handsonnetwork.org/files/resources/filesresourcesPOLresearchSBV_July2007.pdf

as both consultant and doer. They may say, “Here is what I recommend and this is why I recommend it,” before they gain nonprofit (not to mention corporate) support to proceed. In doing so, this employee becomes actively involved in the planning and evaluation of a project. Furthermore, skills-based volunteering is, by its very nature, relevant to the employee’s job, practical and problem-centred.

When it comes to employee development, volunteering is about stretching one’s skills, applying those skills to new challenges, experiencing different world-views and making new connections. The more leadership or ownership the employee has for the project, the greater the learning potential. And the more corporate support that the employee has behind them, the more ambitious and innovative they can be. Whenever possible, allow your employee to be more than one person contributing his or her skills and instead encourage employees to be the liaison that leverages company resources for the greater good.

Paid time off : supporting the volunteers

How companies support employee volunteering ranges across the board. Some companies support paid time off of from a day a year to 35 hours a year, to longer-term volunteer sabbaticals. Some companies support employee volunteers through directed company philanthropies, while others support employee engagement in the philanthropies of their choice.

Here are a few examples:

- In the USA, Green Mountain Coffee Roasters, through their CAFE Program, sponsors employees in paid time off for up to 52 hours a year, and, through a ‘Dollars for Doers program’, provides matching grants of up to \$250 a year to employees who volunteer their time outside of working hours for a minimum of 25 hours a year.¹⁷
- Boots UK, as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility commitments, support MacMillan Cancer Support. An example of employee volunteering within this initiative involves the firm’s No 7 Beauty Advisors. By the end of 2012, 90 beauty advisers had volunteered at ‘Look Good ... Feel Better’ workshops in 59 locations with each adviser undergoing additional specialist training on how to give advice to people experiencing the visual side effects of cancer treatment .¹⁸



¹⁷ Green Mountain Coffee Roasters. Corporate Social Responsibility Report 2010. <https://www.gmcr.com/~/media/Sustainability/PDF/ReportsDisclosures/GMCR%20CSR%20Report.ashx>

¹⁸ Boots. Employee Volunteering. http://www.boots-uk.com/Corporate_Social_Responsibility/Community/Employee_volunteering.aspx

In addition to supporting and encouraging employee involvement in philanthropic events and board services, Deloitte has pledged \$110 million over six years in pro bono services to eligible nonprofit organisations to commit its best company assets - thinking capital - to assist with community-wide challenges.¹⁹

While professional-level staff often manage not for profit project work flexibly, within their regular working day, paid time-off programmes provide a way to support hourly employees or others who want to leave the office for time specific, hands-on activities.

Measuring the impact

If your company has a system for employee evaluation, you already have the basic framework for enhancing learning and performance through volunteering. Start by incorporating volunteering discussions in employee/supervisor one-to-ones. This is an opportunity for the manager to serve as mentor, providing individual feedback and consultation on the volunteer experience. If possible, build volunteering into your annual performance appraisal process and performance reviews.

If you already conduct an employee survey, you could incorporate questions relating to volunteering and skill development. Or, set up formal survey and feedback systems to provide quantifiable outcomes for employee growth.

When it comes to monitoring the financial cost, you'll have a bit more work to do. Determine what you already spend on employee development through other means - conference attendance, one day workshops and seminars - and compare that to what you might spend on employee volunteering. When comparing the cost of employee training through volunteer engagement with more traditional methods, remember to factor in travel expenses and time away from the office. Also, try to factor in other benefits beyond the learning goals - personal satisfaction and health benefits, positive regard for the organisation, increased morale, fewer sick days and greater retention rates. And remember that experiential learning - the kind of learning that can be optimised through volunteer engagement - is proven to be more effective than other traditional methods of training.

Here are three ways to measure the impact of skills-based volunteering on

¹⁹ http://www.deloitte.com/view/en_US/us/About/Community-Involvement/Pro-Bono-Service/index.htm

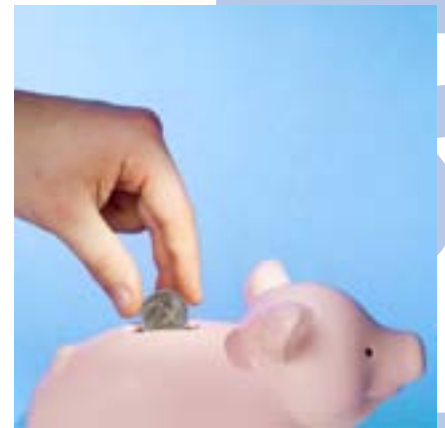


Pro
Bono

employee development:

Track skill gains. Perhaps the easiest way to measure your programme is to simply ask employees and managers to report on skills development. It's important that evaluation and appraisal is a two-way process - with input from both employees and managers - to lend credibility to perceived results. Ask both parties to rate the employee's skills before and then after a volunteer experience.

- Accenture UK & Ireland have built from the ground-up the 'Accenture Business Class Volunteer Programme' to include measurement tools to track inputs, outputs and activity impact. Employees who engage in a volunteer experience are asked a range of follow-up questions, including some about skill development, such as simple as: 'Did the volunteer experience improve job-related skills?'
- The Financial Services Authority (FSA) has identified skill development as the main business value of volunteering. As such, volunteer activities are directly linked to their employee competency framework. Follow up surveys ask what skills volunteers were hoping to develop and which skills they believe were actually improved.
- At Deutsche Bank employees are asked to report on the skills they developed during a volunteer experience. Some employees are called for face-to-face interviews about the experience to provide the organisation with richer data about volunteering.²⁰



For more qualitative results, make skill-building through volunteering part of an employee's regular objective setting and performance review process. Ask managers and employees to talk about how a volunteer experience has helped with his or her professional development goals. Encourage both parties to consider volunteering as a training tool for professional advancement.

Track avoided costs. Calculate what it would have cost to provide equivalent training through a traditional class or workshop. Farron Levy, founder and president of True Impact, a US based company that specialises in measuring the social and business value of corporate activities, asks companies to identify how much it would cost to have employees trained on the skills that were gained through a volunteer experience.²¹

²⁰ Volunteering – The Business Case. Rep. Corporate Citizenship, May 2010. <http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/business/economic-research-and-information/research-publications/Documents/research-2010/Volunteering-The%20Business%20Case.pdf>

²¹ Levy, Farron. "How to Measure the Business Value of Skill Development." True Impact. 7 Nov. 2011. <http://>

For example, assume a trainer comes in to deliver a five-hour project management seminar for 10 employees. Add the £1000 trainer fee to lost employee productivity (50 staff hours multiplied by an average employee salary of £30 per hour) to equal £2,500 in avoided training costs.

Measure productivity impact. Levy also recommends a company track efficiency gains after a volunteer experience.

Or another example, imagine a company's bright emerging PR Executive. After sitting on a volunteer marketing committee, they gain valuable connections in the industry and learn how other companies are pitching stories to the media. Can this employee estimate the hours this information and these connections will save their job? Imagine the employee saves two hours on every pitch - with an average of 24 pitches a year at a say, £25 per hour, that's a productivity savings of £1200!



For more resources on measuring impact read the [Corporate Citizenship Survey](#) from the City of London. The report appendices include three assessment tools, including assessments for new employees, long standing employees and managers.

Employers that want support in their tracking effort could use tools like the one from the Points of Light Foundation that [measures ROI](#) provided in partnership with True Impact and the [Employee Volunteer Program Benchmarking Tool](#) developed with the support from the AT&T Foundation.

Get started!

Nonprofit organisations are eager to help your organisation get started. If you don't already have a volunteer programme in place, a good way to start is to find out if your community has a Volunteer Centre (visit the [Volunteering England](#) website to find out). These volunteer centres are dedicated to matching volunteers with community needs and may even have higher level consulting services available for firms wanting to develop volunteer policies and initiatives. They may also have leadership programmes that connect executive-track staff to board of director opportunities and volunteer effectiveness training.

If you want to jump in with both feet and see how volunteering works in your

organisation, get involved in [Give & Gain Day](#) the UK's national day of employee volunteering, which this year (2013) will be held on Friday 17th May.

You can also visit the following websites for a whole host of additional materials, case studies and examples of the corporate volunteering opportunities offered by a variety of organisations:

- Points of Light Foundation : www.pointsoflight.org
- Kids Company: www.kidsco.org.uk
- Volunteering England : www.volunteering.org.uk
- International Corporate Volunteering with VSO UK : www.vso.org.uk
- Social Enterprise UK : www.socialenterprize.org.uk
- Business in the Community : www.bitc.org.uk

When your employees leverage their skills for community projects, their efforts can lead to lasting community change, valuable employee growth and greater employee engagement. With a triple win like that, the result is well worth the effort.



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