

# Volunteering to Be a Better Manager

by Richard Pound and Karl Moore

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Volunteering in nonprofits isn't just a charitable act; it's a way for executives to hone their management and leadership skills.

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It's an irony of modern corporate life, but one of the greatest challenges in motivating employees to sustain strong business performance is to make them feel there's a larger purpose to their lives than just meeting financial goals. Although business success and the raises, bonuses, and perks that come with it are intrinsic motivators, money and corporate extras aren't everything for most people.

Corporate programs that encourage employees to work as volunteers for organizations in their community are one way to offer an extracorporate benefit that makes employees feel pride and satisfaction, and makes them happier and more productive workers. Marc Benioff, CEO of Salesforce.com, promotes what he calls "the 1 percent solution": 1 percent of the company's equity, 1 percent of its profits, and 1 percent of its employees' paid work hours are devoted to philanthropy. U.S. software maker SAS, which for six years has been among the Top 20 in *Fortune's* annual list of the 100 best companies to work for, offers a volunteer initiative that lets employees use flexible schedules to take paid time off for projects in the community, or even work in teams

with their managers on a volunteer effort during business hours.

To our minds, though, volunteer work isn't just an outlet for employees in search of more meaning in their work lives; it provides an excellent way to prepare for a senior executive position. By volunteering for projects in nonprofit organizations, experienced executives can hone their supervisory and leadership skills, and

all the same management issues they face in their corporations: setting objectives, developing strategies, raising and allocating funds, motivating and guiding people, and complying with regulatory structures.

Because corporate managers volunteering in nonprofits don't have titles to define their positions, they have to practice what some call "permission leadership." That is, they

## For younger managers, nonprofits offer rare chances to learn intangible leadership skills, such as persuasion and mediation.

aspiring executives can gain the experience and networking opportunities that could lead to plum positions in the company.

### Permission Leadership

The management environment in volunteer organizations is often extremely challenging. Without the compensation and organizational authority to keep their teams productive and working toward shared goals, volunteer managers must be adept leaders and persuaders as they tackle

have to earn the trust and respect of the people they are supervising.

Executive awareness of social issues, and of the needs and characteristics of different socioeconomic groups, is also sharpened through volunteer experiences. This is important for corporate managers who must increasingly reconcile the various, and often conflicting, demands of a multitude of stakeholders and special interests, many of which they may not completely understand.

Working in civic, cultural,

recreational, religious, political, or social organizations, a manager also has the opportunity to meet and establish friendships with people from a variety of backgrounds and vocations. For younger managers, a stint in a nonprofit organization provides rare chances to socialize with senior executives and work closely with them to learn intangible leadership skills — such as persuading others to follow your vision, mediating between conflicting parties, addressing workers' concerns and insights, and knowing when to

that they don't have the time to volunteer and do their "day jobs." Or they say volunteering is not appreciated at their companies, and it certainly is not viewed as a way to climb the corporate ladder. In fact, some employees feel that by volunteering, they are potentially derailing their chances for a promotion because of the time they'll spend out of the office.

Because of these attitudes, there is a growing recognition in both the public and the private sectors that corporations need to be more proac-

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## Companies must promote employee volunteerism by providing time off, rewarding efforts, and setting up mentoring programs.

spur a team to action and when to let the team relax. Senior, financially secure executives who donate their time and energy with enthusiasm are role models for younger executives.

### Incentives and Support

If helping others and the community is undertaken purely for the opportunity to network, the full and lasting meaning of volunteerism is missed. Some people who approach it with this attitude will surely lose interest. Still, many of those who start out as volunteers to merely add a credit to their CV begin, in time, to grasp the bigger picture.

Even with all of the advantages of volunteerism — it's good for society, companies, and employees — many employees still resist getting involved. Their main objection is

tive in promoting employee volunteerism. To do this, companies must freely provide time off for participation in volunteer programs; publicly acknowledge, either with promotions or awards, employees who volunteer the most and do it successfully; and set up mentoring programs in which senior executives work with employees in one-on-one sessions to help them navigate obstacles that arise during volunteerism.

Only when these approaches and others are used to demonstrate the corporation's full approval of and engagement in volunteerism will these companies inspire reluctant employees and give them productive volunteer experiences that are good for them, for the company, and for the community. +

### Resources

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