Nine ways to encourage your employees to volunteer to help your community, your company

Written by Cary P. Yates
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Our local schools and nonprofit organizations have always been able to count on financial support from the business community. Their ever increasing need, however, has stretched companies that can only donate so much of their hard-earned profits.

There is another way for your company, large or small, to support our community without putting an extra dent in your donations budget: augment your giving by creating an employee volunteer program to donate free labor to your local organizations.

Many nonprofit organizations continually face the challenge of finding more volunteers, especially those with skills that your employees might already have. These include administration, accounting, legal or writing.

Rather than simply writing another check, your company can fill that need much better by donating employee volunteers.

"By harnessing the power of employee volunteering, small to medium size businesses can affect a sea change in the way private enterprise contributes to public good," says the Points of Light Foundation, which promotes community volunteerism.

The foundation recommends choosing volunteer activities that support your company's ability to reach its objectives and are visible, meaningful or helpful to your customers.

Numerous Benefits

The potential benefits from encouraging your employees to volunteer are numerous. They include increasing employee morale, loyalty and retention by backing causes they support; creating networking opportunities among your own employees; building ties between your employees and our community; providing your employees new avenues to practice their professional skills; and enhancing your company's local reputation.

And by the way, all of the above results could also possibly lead to an increase in your customer loyalty, retention and sales.

Creating A Program

Here are nine ways to encourage your employees to volunteer:

1.   Offer your employees paid time off for their volunteerism. If this is not practical to do on a frequent basis, limit the offer to one day a month or a few days a year.
2.   See if one or more of your employees can create and run a volunteer program. Their role would be to identify local groups that need volunteers and then communicate that information to your other employees.
3.   Seek out organizations such as Habitat for Humanity that need multiple volunteers so your employees can interact as a team outside of the workplace.
4.   Make it fun. Encourage your employees to bring their friends and family members. Provide snacks and refreshments at the volunteer site.
5.   Encourage your top managers to lead by example and volunteer themselves.
6.   Provide your volunteers with company-logo shirts and/or hats. This makes your employees feel special, and lets others know your company supports those hard working, community-minded volunteers.
7.   Create a tracking system so your employees can easily log the hours they volunteer each month. Celebrate their efforts by recognizing your top volunteers annually with an award or special luncheon, a story in the company newsletter, a note from you and/or a grant to their favorite nonprofit.
8.   Consider implementing a volunteer-leave program that enables one or more employees to apply to volunteer full-time at a non-profit organization for an extended period while retaining their pay and benefits.

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9.   Think about starting a volunteer grant program that provides cash awards and/or in-kind contributions (such as used office equipment) to the nonprofit groups where your employees donate most of their time.

For more ideas, look online at www.pointsoflight.org. There's no doubt that our local business community has the talent and expertise to fill most – if not all – the essential volunteer roles at our local nonprofit organizations. And when a school or non-profit organization teams with local companies to recruit and support volunteers, our community wins.{jcomments on}