

USASK ALUMNI VOLUNTEER

TEN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING

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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)

Brains in your head, feet in your shoes, and a diploma in hand may be good starts, but volunteerism offers you wonderful opportunities for professional development and personal growth. **If you are looking for ways to enhance your career consider these then professional development of volunteering:**

- 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 lifelong 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. A young colleague at the university serves as a volunteer advisor for a student honorary group to keep her in touch with today's students - their likes, interests, music, and concerns. She says it helps her in her counseling work to be aware of current trends and interests among the students.
- 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. Serving as a committee chair increases facilitation skills. Planning and implementing a major fund raising event can develop goal setting, planning and budgeting skills. Supervising and training other volunteers helps to develop supervisory and training skills. Volunteering offers unlimited opportunities to cultivate new skills that can enhance a career.

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. Volunteering is an excellent place to experiment, practice and try out new techniques and skills. It offers you the opportunity to build your self-confidence through practice. Additionally, volunteering provides you with opportunities to observe others and select best practices. You can stretch yourself in a new way that can benefit your career.

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. If you are thinking of a career change, volunteering is a perfect way to explore new fields. Sometimes a volunteer experience can lead you to something you never even thought about or help you discover a skill or interest you were unaware of. You can strengthen your personal/professional mission and vision by exploring opportunities and expanding your horizons.

6. Volunteering gives you the satisfaction of knowing you are doing good and being involved in your community. A young professional man was very troubled by the Columbine High School shooting because he had personally felt like an outsider in high school and decided he would become a big brother to serve as a positive influence in a young life. He now feels connected in a whole new way. He is also gaining valuable personal skills such as patience and tolerance that have enhanced his professional standing. There are so many options for being involved in your community, through professional associations, neighborhood organizations, arts and historic organizations and social service organizations. 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. A young manager at a major bank once told me that he loved to volunteer at the local food pantry on the same night as the bank's vice president. This was his opportunity to be seen and known personally by the vice president. Volunteer work can indeed expose you to a wide range of people, including many strong, influential community leaders. Our city has a young professional association called the "Movers and Shakers" because they want to be seen as people who get things done.

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. Volunteering around a personal interest or hobby can be fun, relaxing and energizing. 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. Managing a group of volunteers is not the same as managing employees. Volunteer groups are often groups of peers and they respond more to leadership than management. You will have opportunities to lead by persuasion, innovation and your ideas and ideals. 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. Work experience is work experience, with or without a paycheck. If you are developing new skills or thinking of pursuing a new career, volunteer work can give you valuable, practical experience. Career counselors, and headhunters encourage job seekers to document pertinent volunteer experiences. 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.

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