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## **Creating a Socially Conscious Workforce**

*The benefits of employee volunteerism*

How can an organization improve its image, increase employee satisfaction and help others all at the same time? By encouraging, supporting and assisting employees in volunteer activities. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that 64.5 million people did volunteer work at least once from September 2003 to September 2004. Of those, 40.7 million are currently in the workforce. You may not be aware that many of your employees are already part of this group, with many more being added every day.

What are the benefits of supporting employee volunteerism? The payoffs to employers are significant and can be felt throughout the organization. These may include:

- Increased employee motivation and loyalty, which can reduce costly turnover
- A reduction in unplanned absences and call-ins because of an approved volunteer time-off policy
- Increased overall productivity due to a flexible schedule
- Workforce skill development. Volunteer activities can enhance a variety of employee skills, including:
  - Written and verbal communication skills
  - Organizational and time management skills
  - Interpersonal skills – caring, listening, negotiating, understanding, respect for diversity
  - Budgeting
  - Stress management
  - Training/teaching
  - Presentation skills
- Enhanced recruiting efforts. A company is more attractive to many potential employees if it has flexible working arrangements and a commitment to the community and those in need
- Personal opportunity for the employee to demonstrate support of the company's mission and values
- Increased brand recognition and media attention through public awareness of the positive contributions made by the employer and employees

### **A Real-World Example**

Within our local community, Schneider National, Inc. has long been a supporter of employee volunteerism. One organization that benefits from this support is Brown County Junior Achievement, which provides opportunities for employees to use and share their presentation and business skills to educate youth throughout the area.

The comments below illustrate the benefits to employees and the people they serve through volunteer efforts.

“Many managers use Junior Achievement as an opportunity to develop the skills of their employees. These include presentation skills, organization skills and leadership experience. Information Technology leadership uses the Junior Achievement opportunity for many employees who want to advance their skills and careers to move into management. Junior Achievement gives them a better sense of awareness and helps them to deal with others. Our Training and Development departments use Junior Achievement as a "Train-the-Trainer" for new trainers. This is a great place to cut employees' teeth in training.”

*Rob Reich - V.P. Enterprise Recruiting*

“Junior Achievement provides children with a variety of learning courses from kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Through these programs and volunteers, students learn the value of education, community and the economics of life. These hands-on programs help students realize their potential and open their eyes to the business world outside of the classroom.”

*Nancy Ledvina - Volunteer, JA Board Member*

### **Starting an Employee Volunteer Program**

As with any new initiative, upper level support is crucial in creating commitment throughout the organization. Once management is on board, communication becomes the key to involving employees and creating a successful program. Write a basic, straightforward policy outlining who is eligible to participate (ideally, all employees), the goals of the program and how it will be administered. Update employee handbooks, create postings/e-mails and hold meetings to inform employees about the availability and options of the program.

Consider allowing employees paid time-off as part of your policy. As with any time-off request, it must be made in advance and with business needs in mind. For example, eight hours paid per year available in hourly increments may be an option depending upon position. No matter what the amount, offering time-off instills importance in the program and the company's commitment.

Once the program is under way, track employee usage and solicit feedback from their experiences. These stories can be used to promote the organization's involvement and instill a sense of pride in employees. The immeasurable impact felt by the community can be the most important benefit, and knowing your role in it will often be the only reason needed to move forward with your own program.

For more information on corporate volunteer programs, visit this website to view the PDF file on *Developing Excellence in Workplace Volunteer Programs: Guidelines for Success* from The Points of Light Foundation and Volunteer Center National Network at [http://www.bsanetwork.com/resources/toolkits/biz\\_3.pdf](http://www.bsanetwork.com/resources/toolkits/biz_3.pdf).