

NETWORKING

Volunteer Opportunities Pay Off

Volunteering is good for your soul, and it can also be good for your resume.

By Debra Donston-Miller

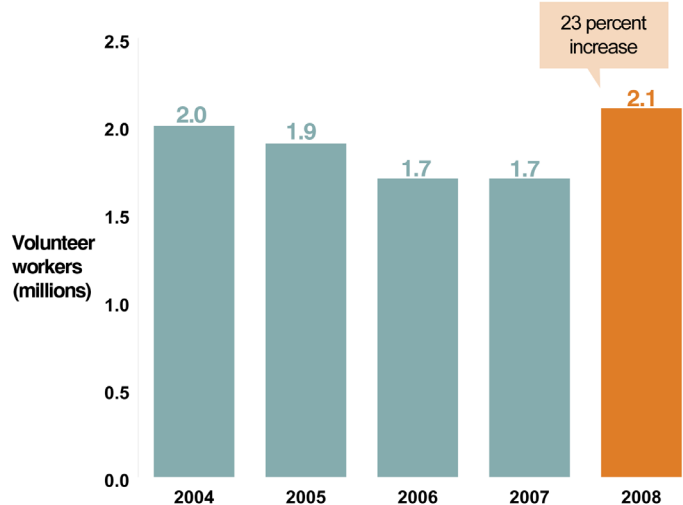
MANY IN THE RANKS OF THE UNEMPLOYED have sought out volunteer work to pass the time and remain active in the absence of a 9-to-5 daily assignment. And some of those volunteers have found, by design or serendipity, that donating time and skills to a charity can be a ticket to employment.

Making such a transition takes planning. Job seekers who have leveraged charity work into full-time work, executives who run nonprofit organizations and job-search experts

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More Unemployed Americans Volunteering

Volunteer labor in 2008 saw its highest level in five years, up 23 percent from the previous year.



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey, September 2008

Chip Buchanan/TheLadders



Investing in Altruism

By Matthew Rothenberg, Editor-in-Chief, TheLadders.com

CAN YOU DO WELL by doing good? That's the question TheLadders' business writer Debra Donston-Miller asks this week.

Donston-Miller interviewed nonprofits and successful job seekers about how volunteer work can polish your competitive edge as well as your karma. They gave her specific, tactical advice about how to make good works pay off.

Deriving the maximum benefit from volunteer work means finding the right fit; besides identifying organizations they can get behind, job seekers should offer up skills that are relevant to their searches and identify contacts who can help them achieve their career goals.

"If you volunteer in a situation where you can utilize your day-to-day business skills, (it's) a great way to fur-

ther your career because you're essentially doing a job and not just sitting around," Rahul D. Yodh, an executive recruiter with Link Legal Search Group in Dallas, told Donston-Miller. "At the same time, you're building some contacts, and you never know where that will lead," Yodh said. "If you can get a high-enough level volunteering position, then that's probably the best route to take." ■

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What did you think of this package? Got a story of your own to tell? Have ideas for future coverage? Please write Editor-in-Chief Matthew Rothenberg at matthewr@theladders.com.

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told TheLadders that making the connection is not as simple as signing up to serve meals at the senior center.

To turn volunteer work into employment requires a strategic decision about what organizations are most likely to help your career and what roles you can serve that will put you in a position to connect your volunteer service to full-time work, these experts said.

But don't discount your passion for a particular cause or group, they cautioned. Combining a strategic appraisal of your options and your heart's desire can lead to a job that nourishes your income and your soul.

Do what you know

Here's just one example: After she was laid off in April of this year, Jane, a marketing professional in Massachusetts, thought long and hard about what she really wanted to do next.

During college, she had done a work study and volunteered for the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. This summer Jane, who asked that her last name and other specifics not be used for this story, decided that animal welfare was her calling and went back to her MSPCA roots.

The difference this time: Jane saw volunteering at the agency as an opportunity to gain the experience and contacts she would need to secure a paying job.

Jane approached the MSPCA about doing some pro bono marketing work. This move put her directly in front of the directors of marketing at the MSPCA agency she hoped might connect her to full-time work there or help her network to find another job. She never had the chance to test that tactic. She found her next job at a Web site focused on animal welfare through an online posting.

"While I was volunteering, I actually found the job... online," said Jane. "One of the people who I was volunteering with had worked at the company previously. I said, 'Hey, do you know anyone whom I can show my resume to?' She said, 'I'll send it,' and the rest is history."

Jane volunteered at the MSPCA because she believed in the work it does, but she volunteered in a role that she could leverage in her job search, she said. It's why she volunteered to work in the marketing department and not as, say, a kennel cleaner or dog walker.

Choosing the right role for your charity work is key to connecting volunteer work to full-time work, said Rahul D. Yodh, an executive recruiter with Link Legal Search Group in Dallas. "If you volunteer in a situation where you can utilize your day-to-day business skills, then I think it's a great idea and a great way to further your career because you're essentially doing a job, not just sitting around."

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—Rahul D. Yodh, executive recruiter, Link Legal Search Group



HIRED!

Volunteering Expands Network, Reveals Jobs

When Brian Clark needed to extend his network, he turned to volunteer work.

By Patty Orsini

WORKING FOR A STARTUP requires long hours and a lot of dinners away from home. When the startup Brian Clark was working for — a mobile e-mail platform company — ran out of financing in February 2008, Clark saw it as a chance to take some time off, relax and recharge. At that point, the economy was in relatively good shape, and he felt he could afford to spend time with his family. "I was relaxed about the job hunt," he said. "I thought I should enjoy some time off, because I didn't know when I'd get the chance again."

He ended up with a longer hiatus than he expected. A year longer.

His first instinct: Go to his network.

His second: Expand that network.

"I was working on the assumption that your network lasts about four months," he said. "After that, you've tapped that contact out. So, you need to keep refreshing it."

Clark's strategy: to volunteer on local government committees in Thousand Oaks, Calif., the suburb of Los Angeles

where he lives. He used his business-development expertise to assist the investment committee as well as a few nonprofits in the area. This helped the city government make decisions about which events and groups the city should provide with funds. "We'd go over applications, make sure applications were complete, and discuss the various options," Clark said.

In doing so, he said, he was able to expand his professional network. "I made a lot of business contacts; people who

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“At the same time, you’re building some contacts, and you never know where that will lead,” Yodh said. “If you can get a high-enough level volunteering position, then that’s probably the best route to take.”

Leverage your network

Volunteering is the route Nate Towne traveled to a public-relations job in Wisconsin after relocating from Maine.

Three years ago, Towne moved from Portland, Maine, to Madison, Wis. He found himself without a job or any business contacts in that part of the country. He decided to build his network by joining a local chapter of the Public Relations Society of America.

Not long afterward, Towne realized that the organization was in dire need of volunteers

to help judge entries for a regional PR awards program. The chair of the judging committee was also the PR director of Madison’s largest advertising firm, Hiebing, and Towne figured volunteering was a way to demonstrate his skills to a prominent figure in his profession.

“I realized, ‘What better chance will I have to demonstrate my skills in a PR setting than to actually work with people who are already employed at some big agencies and at big hiring companies here in Madison and around Madison?’” Towne said. “I can show them a.) that I’m willing to roll up my sleeves and work for no pay and b.) that I’m a smart person who gets things done and has some opinions about how things should be done.”

“If you can get a high-enough level volunteering position, then that’s probably the best route to take.”

—Rahul D. Yodh

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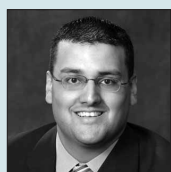
Five Steps to Volunteer Your Way to a Job

Industry experts and job hunters who have successfully parlayed volunteerism into a paying job provided the following advice.

By Debra Donston-Miller

1. Use your network to find open volunteer positions. That will get you into an organization faster.

— Jane, a job hunter who turned a volunteer job with the MSPCA into a paying job with a Web site focused on animal welfare



3. If you are able to secure a position where you’re actually doing a job that’s in line with your skill set, then you can absolutely list that on your resume as a position you’ve held. Disclose that you were a volunteer, but list all of the duties and responsibilities that you had, as well as any significant responsibilities.

— Rahul D. Yodh, executive recruiter with Link Legal Search Group



2. Determine whether the volunteer opportunity matches your “availability horizon,” both so you can achieve success and so you don’t leave the nonprofit in the lurch.

— Robert J. Rosenthal, VolunteerMatch director of communications



4. Join a professional organization or a chamber of commerce within your region. These organizations are already in the business of helping each other, and there’s always a need for fresh blood. Professional organizations are a fantastic place to network and work. It’s great exposure on many levels.

— Nate Towne, who found his position as a public-relations counselor at the Hiebing ad agency by performing volunteer work for an industry professional organization

5. Treat an extended volunteer job like any other job on your resume, provided it is related to your profession and can demonstrate what you accomplished at the charity.

— Stephen Van Vreede and Steve Burdan, both certified professional resume writers who work with TheLadders

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owned or work at local companies or in Los Angeles,” Clark said. “My goal was to stay in the L.A. area, so it was important to make contact with people in the community.”

Clark found that working on community committees helped in other ways.

Avoid isolation

“Expanding my network was not only healthy from a business standpoint but from an emotional standpoint as well,” he said. “Being unemployed can be isolating. But volunteering, having social interaction, having a full schedule and places to invest your time, is invigorating.”

Joining SalesLadder in August 2008 was another part of Clark’s strategy to keep his network up to date. “When I applied to a job on TheLadders, I often spoke to recruiters and HR people,” he said. “I was able to add 20 to 30 people to my network that I kept in contact with.”

Clark, who was looking for a position in new-business development that was director level or above, was also expanding his options in the working world. “My initial resume was focused on digital entertainment,” he said. “But then, realizing it was getting tougher to get a job, I came up with two other resumes, one for platform sales and another for channel sales. I went in thinking I didn’t need three resumes. I thought my network would come through. But as I had interviews and companies were not hiring, I realized this was a daunting task, and I needed a little more strategy to accomplish this.”

Clark said he worked six to eight hours every day on his job search, contacting people in his network, crafting cover letters and doing volunteer work.

From media to technology

He received a good response to his resumes, but the economy wasn’t cooperating. “I had final interviews with 10 or 12 companies over the past several months,” Clark said. “I had a final interview with Warner Bros. the day they announced layoffs. They put the position I was interviewing for on hold. It was frustrating.”

Frustrating, but not debilitating.

He continued doing volunteer work, contacting his network and honing his cover letters. In April, he heard from a recruiter

with whom he had developed a good relationship after applying for a position he found on TheLadders. While that initial position didn’t work out, the recruiter had another job that she thought would be a good fit.

“She contacted me about a business-development role,” he said. “It’s technology based, and they needed a lot of the skills that I had. It’s not content, but it’s setting up client partnerships.”

“The experience that I was going to be able to leverage was my ability to go out and deliver the core value proposition to clients and get them to sign up,” Clark continued. “It was exactly what I had done in the past, just with different clients. Same process, same sales cycle, same methodology.”

“Expanding my network was not only healthy from a business standpoint but from an emotional standpoint as well.”

—Brian Clark

And, after going more than a year without a job, it took just one month from first interview to offer. He is now the director of business development for Answer Financial, a division of **White Mountains Insurance Group Ltd.**

A year-long search

While Clark was eager to take time off after his last position, he hadn’t planned on taking such a long break. He said it’s good to be working again. But he hasn’t let all that he accomplished while he was looking for jobs fall by the wayside. “I’m still doing the committees. I can’t spend as much time as I used to, but it’s great; I love doing it. I feel more rounded.”

Clark said if there’s anything else he’s learned, it’s that during a job hunt, it’s easy to lose confidence in your abilities. “You need to be conscious of doing things to build confidence,” he said. “Joining committees, sitting down with someone who needed help with a business plan, was a good thing for me. It’s important to put yourself in situations where other people value what you say.”

Otherwise, he said, it can be hard to go on interviews and convince other people you can offer them something of value, and it causes a downward spiral of confidence. “You’ll begin to wonder, ‘What am I doing wrong? I must not be as smart as I thought.’ It’s not a good place to be.

“So, if you’re unemployed, don’t spend your time inside. Get out there; talk to people, and find out how you can be of value. Being involved in my community is the silver lining to being unemployed. But it did take me a long time to see that silver lining.” ■

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As luck would have it, Hiebing was hiring. “I was the first one called because they had already worked with me,” Towne said. He was hired as public-relations counselor at Hiebing.

Choose your charity carefully

Both Jane and Nate were strategic about choosing the organizations they volunteered for and the services they provided to those organizations. But that’s not to say that you will easily have your pick of nonprofits, especially when you are offering up a specific set of business skills.

Jane researched many nonprofit organizations, within and outside the animal-welfare area, and found that about half were interested in her marketing skills while half didn’t really know what they could do with them.

Organizations such as VolunteerMatch.org and Idealist.org can help you find a good fit.

The goal of VolunteerMatch, based in San Francisco, is “to help nonprofits reach their mission through effective volunteering,” said Robert J. Rosenthal, VolunteerMatch’s director of communications.

“The range of volunteer activities that are posted at VolunteerMatch really represents the spectrum of national and community service activities in this country, and that includes unskilled and skilled labor,” he said. “As a result, a huge percentage of people who do volunteer work as a strategy for career development and promotion are finding their opportunities in places like VolunteerMatch.”

It is hard to say how many people are volunteering as part of their job-search strategy; the recession and unemployment have resulted in a rise in volunteers and volunteer hours, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Sixty-one million Americans volunteered in 2008, one million more than the previous year, according to the BLS. The increase is even more

profound among the unemployed. More than 2.1 million unemployed workers volunteered last year, up from 1.7 million in 2007, a 23.5 percent increase. Statistics for 2009 won’t be available until January 2010, the BLS said.

Rosenthal said that, year over year, VolunteerMatch has seen a big jump in usage.

“We know that for the first six months of 2009, our numbers were substantially higher than the numbers for the first six months of 2008, both in terms of unique visitors and in terms of people actually finding something they were looking for and clicking on the button that says, ‘I want to help.’”

Still volunteering

Nate Towne wanted to help even after he had found a paying job in Madison.

Towne is currently volunteering for HospiceCare, both because he believes strongly in the work the organization does and because it gives him a chance to network and gain experience.

“I think volunteering is something important to do, and it helps round out my resume in the nonprofit sector,” he said. “I volunteer time in the gardens. I’m doing non-business things, but I’m doing it with a lot of business leaders here in Madison.”

In the end, any volunteer experience — no matter what your motivation going in — can be a valuable boost to your resume and can help you stand out from a growing crowd.

“Get as much as you can out of the volunteering experience,” said Theo Stripling, program associate with Literacy Volunteers of Illinois. “You never know when you’re going to be presented with an opportunity. You may pick up another skill set along the way that makes you more marketable, and that’s something that’s very hard to do these days.” ■

How to Treat Volunteer Assignments on Your Resume

Pro bono work is a job like any other, resume writers say.

By John Hazard

BESIDES presenting new opportunities in your job search, volunteer work can fill in the gaps on your resume, according to Stephen Van Vreede and Steve Burdan, both certified professional resume writers who work with TheLadders.

When it comes to presenting volunteer work in writing, treat it like a job. Certified professional resume writers advise clients to handle an extended volunteer job on your resume as you would any other position, provided it is related to your profession and you can demonstrate what you accomplished at the charity.

It should be listed in your job history, with all the relevant information, but the entry should clearly state that it was a volunteer position. ■

Career Advice from TheLadders

- Differentiating Your Skills in a Downturn
- Volunteer Work: The Ultimate Interview
- Your Layoff, Your Brain: How to Get Out of Your Own Way
- Visibility through Philanthropy