

Public service has corporate, personal benefits

BY CLINTON O. LONGENECKER

Today, Toledo is recognizing four great difference-makers in our community. They are the 2010 Jefferson Awards recipients for outstanding public service: Richard Faist, Kim Holmes, Mary Lou Leonard, and Duke Wheeler.

They, along with others who were nominated for the award and countless other local volunteers, have one big thing in common: a lifestyle of serving others and giving back to our community.

Without these difference-makers, the overall quality of life in our town would suffer. Most community agencies and many public services rely on volunteers to make things work.

The need for volunteers continues to grow rapidly. As budgets tighten locally, regionally, and nationally, agencies of all types must depend more heavily on volunteer labor and leadership.

Support for volunteering varies greatly from community to community, but the untapped overall potential is gigantic. Across the country, organizations of all sizes are showing corporate responsibility by creating formal employee volunteer programs that help address community needs more systematically.

It is in everyone's best interest to understand how we can all work together to match a community's needs with its resources through public service. So it's important to consider why people and organizations voluntarily give of their time, talents, and treasure in public service.

Last year, Prof. Joe Scazzero of Eastern Michigan University and I conducted a national survey for the Jefferson Awards to examine why organizations and employees volunteer. Our findings were featured in a report to the White House and U.S. Senate on volunteerism in America.

Among the primary reasons that organizations establish formal volunteer programs and encourage employee public service:

These efforts encourage organizations to give back to their communities.

They allow organizations to align themselves and resources with causes they believe in.

They believe these efforts foster positive public relations. Volunteering encourages and promotes teamwork and cooperation, inside and outside the enterprise.

These efforts make employees proud of their places of employment.

These programs help create important business contacts and networks.

Business leaders believe these efforts help develop the leadership talents of their personnel.

Volunteering can help retain good employees.

These are the primary reasons employees volunteer:

They want to support causes that are important to them on a personal level.

Employees believe volunteering helps their professional and personal development.

Volunteering is viewed as a good source of personal satisfaction and happiness.

It allows them to help address specific community needs.

It sets a good example for their children.

Volunteering helps employees maintain work/life balance.

It helps build working relationships and networks, inside and outside the workplace.

It provides an opportunity to put faith into practice.

Our survey revealed that when people volunteer and give back to their communities, it has a powerful and positive effect on them, personally and professionally. As people volunteer, good things happen to them and the community.

As organizations everywhere struggle to compete and people cope with busy and uncertain lives, developing a systematic approach to volunteering can provide great benefits to organizations and employees alike.

Organizations that have formalized volunteer programs can make a host of good business arguments for doing so. Shouldn't your organization consider creating a formal program to promote community service and volunteerism? It is a cost-effective win-win-win. Your business, employees, and community all will benefit from this call to action.

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