



Gain New Perspective by Volunteering

Although most of us think about volunteering from time to time, we often put it on a “to do” list but never get around to it. Try just one new venture, and you can expand your horizon and skill set.

When we think about acquiring knowledge or skills, many times we think of taking classes or seeking new responsibilities at work. Great options, but often we overlook a different way to add a fresh dimension to our careers—through volunteering.

What comes to mind when you think about volunteering? More obvious opportunities may involve helping charities whose missions focus on disaster relief, food, clothing, shelter, literacy, health, or youth services. Opportunities you hear about most often may be more physical in nature and frequently utilize large volunteer groups that focus on project completion or specific events. These activities are typically very rewarding and may not require special skills, just a great attitude and willingness to work. And they provide a great release if you spend your day in an office!

Also seek volunteer activities that expand your professional abilities. As accounting and finance professionals, when we approach

charities about volunteering, we often hear “We can always use help with accounting!” The next thing we know, we’re asked to be a treasurer or to join an investment committee. We may be drawn to these roles because they are in our comfort zone, but we may be missing chances to grow outside our obvious areas of expertise.

How *do* you volunteer to broaden your horizon? Look at weak areas on your résumé, and then seek board of directors’ or general volunteer roles helping with a project or serving on a task force. For example, do you want to gain experience in sales or relationship building? Look for opportunities to help with fund raising or development. Consider serving on a public relations committee where you can learn more about the importance of an organization’s public image. Want to learn more about how to position products and services? Ask about volunteer activities in marketing. Want to be more strategic? Consider serving on a strategic planning committee so you can gain an “organization-wide” perspective. Do you lack global experience? Find an international charity that serves diverse cultures. Need to increase leadership experience? Consider chairing

a committee or working toward a board chair position.

How do you find a charity that’s a good match? Contact volunteer banks, or search on the Internet for nonprofits whose missions you are passionate about. Don’t be hesitant to look outside your community, and think regionally, nationally, or globally. You can also learn more about the nonprofit sector in general by reading publications or searching websites that focus on philanthropy.

Don’t overlook professional organizations that offer the advantage of broadening your peer network. IMA® has many volunteer opportunities via chapters, councils, and at our global level. If you aren’t affiliated with a chapter in your area, call IMA, and we’ll get you connected!

I hope these suggestions will help you find opportunities that give you intrinsic rewards and prepare you for growth in your “day job.” I’m a passionate volunteer, and I believe my experiences with nonprofit organizations have given me opportunities and leadership training that I could never have received on the job or through formal education!

I welcome your comments at srichtermeier@imanet.org. **SF**