

# 5 Ways Volunteering Can Enhance Your Career



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In the 2016 [Millennial Impact Report](#), over 77% of Millennials said they would be more likely to volunteer if they could leverage a specific skill or expertise to benefit a cause. But what if I told you that by volunteering, you can gain vital skills to take your career to the next level. And if your company is promoting or hire Millennials, looking at their volunteer experience can help you better identify a candidate for the position.

Gregory Burton, vice president of Marketing & Communications for [Big Brothers Big Sisters Independence Region](#) and Debbie Roman, senior director of Member Strategy for [Girl Scouts of Eastern Pennsylvania](#) explain how volunteering can not only positively impact your community but how it can give employers a unique insight into their Millennial candidates and give them the opportunity to stretch their skill set.

**Alissa Carpenter:** How can Millennials get involved in their local community if they don't know where to start?

**Gregory Burton:** The good news is that there are a myriad of paths for Millennials to support their communities by volunteering for charitable causes or nonprofit organizations operating where they live. The biggest challenge is choosing the best organization that will have the most meaningful impact.

I would advise people to make a list of the nonprofit organizations within their geographic footprint that work with those causes. Then decide what type of time commitment would fit in with their professional and personal schedule. From that point it's simply a matter of making a phone call, because nearly all nonprofits are overly eager to accept those willing to volunteer and bring them into the fold.

**Debbie Roman:** There are multiple ways Millennials can learn where to volunteer within their community. Research the name of the organization and identify the contact person; typically it is the community partnerships office or volunteer support. Depending on the size of the organization, it's a good idea to reach out to the executive director directly or the human resources department.

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Based on your area of interest or experience, make your services available to the organization. Common areas for volunteering are: marketing, communications, events, research and development, data entry, tutoring, mentoring, graphic design, among others.

**Carpenter:** What skills can Millennials learn through volunteering that can lead to advancement in their career?

**Burton:** Nonprofits have spent a lot of time developing volunteer opportunities that would be beneficial to this demographic and make their organization more attractive. Nonprofits run very much like corporate entities, except for the funding component. For that reason, there are similar operational departments such as finance, human resources, special events, marketing & communications, fundraising or fund development, and recruitment that offer opportunities for Millennials to learn new, and often, extremely valuable skills. Program management, financial management and accounting, negotiation,

event sponsorship and management, marketing, public relations and social media, web development, technology processes and system implementation, government relations, and board management are all key skills young professionals can learn and transfer to their own professions. Perhaps most important, they will get “hands-on” experience which makes the learning curve much faster.

**Roman:** The skills gained through volunteering are the transferable skills. These skills are necessary to advance in any career. We are referring to, interpersonal skills, customer service, people and time management skills, delegation, listening, and analytics. Volunteering with community based organizations or non-profit organization, it's all hands-on deck. It's also an opportunity to gain experience in areas such as entrepreneurship, leadership, and motivation.

**Carpenter:** What do volunteering and networking have in common?

**Burton:** Volunteering and networking are essentially the same – the only difference is that volunteers are working on a real-life project, together. Volunteering is often better than traditional networking because those who volunteer are uniquely exposed to industries and individuals they would otherwise never be able to meet. Big Brothers Big Sisters, for example, has an incredible governing Board of Directors made up of influential corporate leaders, government officials, entertainers, professional athletes, and more. Volunteers get direct access to these people and work with them side by side. These individuals often become more than just “someone they met” - they can become mentors and in some cases, offer leads to new careers. They can also be influential in assisting a volunteer with their personal business goals.

**Roman:** They both allow you the opportunity to meet people who will have a positive impact in your professional development. While volunteering you meet people that have your interest in the same industry and support your cause. Both can be added to your resume as community engagement or volunteer experience. When looking for professional growth, volunteering and networking provide you opportunities to identify and connect with a mentor

**Carpenter:** How can employers learn more about their Millennial employees through their involvement within the community?

**Burton:** I'm going to flip this. The real question is what can Millennial employees learn about their employers through their involvement within the community? Times have changed and generational shifts are at play. Today, Millennials are selecting their employers based on the community initiatives their prospective companies support. They also care deeply about their employer's stance on sensitive issues facing society today, particularly when it comes to social justice.

**Roman:** Employers can learn a lot from the volunteer commitments of their Millennials. It speaks to their areas of interest and what they feel it's important to them. Employer should engage in their cause and support it when the opportunity rises. Doing so, will increase the commitment of the Millennial to the employer organization.

**Carpenter:** How can organizations who are looking for new talent use volunteer experience to gain deeper insight on potential candidates?

**Burton:** There are tons of talented individuals out there in the marketplace looking for great places to work. They all look the same on paper. What separates individuals, aside from their work experience, is their personal interests and community volunteer efforts. You can tell a tremendous amount about someone's character by the causes they support and by how much effort they put into supporting them. If you, as the employer, have a defined set of core values that all of your employees live by, this will help you determine whether or not the candidate is the "perfect" fit – not just a "good" fit. Oftentimes, the volunteer is more of a decisive factor than being top of their class or winning that big deal. And it can lead to very interesting conversations.

**Roman:** It is key for organization to use volunteers to grow their pipeline for potential candidates. Volunteers learn the mission and vision of the organization. They are committed and believe in the cause prior to any potential employment. They are champions and ambassadors. Through volunteer support, the organizations are able to identify specific needs of the team and overall organizational growth. It allows organizations to identify opportunities for program / organizational development by utilizing the outcome from the work completed by the volunteers as necessary for the organization.

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