

VOLUNTEERISM

WHAT MAKES AMERICA GREAT



WHY SERVE?

**John Bridgeland, Assistant to the President and Director,
USA Freedom Corps**

In his State of the Union address in January 2002, President George W. Bush asked every American to give at least two years of their lives in service to their neighbors and their Nation. He created the USA Freedom Corps to connect millions of Americans to volunteer service opportunities across the country and around the world.

Last year the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics counted more than 59 million Americans who are already volunteering through schools, faith-based organizations, non-profits, and hospitals. So of all the things he could ask for, why more volunteer service? Part of the answer lies in a documented 30-year decline in civic engagement in the United States. The other part rests in the three basic reasons why individuals serve: service helps meet critical needs in our communities; service shapes individual character and gives purpose to our lives; and service is important to our country.

There are needs in America's communities that volunteers are uniquely able to address. For example, volunteers mentor millions of children at risk of not reaching productive adulthood; serve food to families who seek hunger relief; and help care for homebound seniors. Volunteers also respond to emergencies of all kinds, including the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

By helping others, we also build our own characters. Through volunteer service we can each connect to needs or purposes that are greater than our own comfort. By doing that, we take responsibility as citizens and we take steps toward a more complete and happy life.

Our Nation is the greatest force for good in history, and we sustain that force through our service to others. Americans can boast a long tradition of service to others at home and abroad, and by continuing to serve, we connect to generations of Americans long gone, many of whom died to protect the freedoms we enjoy now, and also to the generations of Americans to come, who will inherit the world strengthened by our legacy of service.

To connect all Americans to what service can offer, the USA Freedom Corps is working with the institutions that shape our lives – schools, community groups, government agencies, and businesses. It is through America's businesses that we can

reach individuals as employees and customers to encourage and enable them to get involved in service to their communities. More than 300 companies and business organizations representing more than 3 million employees and countless consumers have come together to create a nationwide effort called "Business Strengthening America," which will help the USA Freedom Corps achieve its objectives by committing America's businesses to significant changes in their practices, policies, and programs in order to support volunteer service.

Each of the members of Business Strengthening America has made a substantial and long-lasting commitment to dedicating corporate resources to mobilize employees, customers and vendors in service and civic engagement activities, and to report annually on its efforts to support volunteer service. One company has established a new policy of allowing employees paid time to volunteer in their communities, and several others have expanded their existing policies and programs to support volunteer activity. Another Business Strengthening America company that manages residences for more than 20,000 seniors is working to engage its residents as Senior Corps volunteers. Several companies are launching technologies to better track, recognize and encourage employee service, and several more are using their consumer materials such as bank statements and bills to feature messages on volunteer service.

Our goal in working together is to engage the millions of Americans who work with or buy from these businesses in strengthening their character, their communities and their country. If we are successful, we will also prove the premise that America's companies can do well by doing good.

Whether you represent a business, a government agency, a school, or just yourself, you can join the USA Freedom Corps in answering the President's call to service. The USA Freedom Corps Volunteer Network includes millions of opportunities to work with more than 60,000 organizations across the country and around the world that give help and hope to those in need. Whatever your interest and wherever you are, you can take part in creating an American culture of service, citizenship, and responsibility that will last for decades to come.

For more information about the USA Freedom Corps, the federal agencies and programs that support volunteer service such as the Corporation for National and Community Service, Peace Corps, and Citizen Corps, and initiatives such as Business Strengthening America, visit www.usafreedomcorps.gov or call 1-877-USA-CORPS.



BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL

Michelle Nunn

Service can be a powerful platform for building community and social capital. Volunteering has long been a strong American tradition with support coming from diverse groups – including our businesses, religious institutions, and volunteer organizations. Despite the decline in political and civic engagement as evidenced by lower voter participation and fewer people actively involved in the political parties, volunteer activity in the United States is on the rise. More than ever before, individuals, communities and scholars are examining how changing patterns of volunteerism affect the creation of social capital.

Maximizing Volunteer Impact

Scholar Robert Putnam has defined social capital as: “the collective value of all ‘social networks’ and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other.” Social networks matter to the individual and the community. Volunteering is not only one of the most powerful mechanisms through which individuals build social networks, it is also an important indicator of social capital and a tool for building it. Volunteers provide the human capital to alleviate community problems, advocate for social

change, research new discoveries, protect neighborhoods, and worship together in community.

While volunteers are doing this work, they are making new connections, building their own sense of community, learning new skills, fostering heightened self-esteem, and cultivating leadership capacities. Additionally, volunteering has been shown, when coupled with reflection, to develop the skills of citizenship and greater political efficacy – it raises the volunteer’s awareness of important societal issues and makes the volunteer a more informed citizen.

An individual who volunteers at a soup kitchen develops a better understanding of the factors contributing to hunger and homelessness; an after-school tutor can better appreciate the current state of affairs in education in their community; a citizen involved in parks and rivers clean-up efforts better comprehends the environmental issues facing their region.

For volunteer service to reach its greatest potential, it must also provide common ground for people to meet and know one another across differences. Volunteerism can serve as a platform for meaningful exchanges that bridge chasms of class, race, and power. Service provides unique ground for diverse

people to work together toward common goals and to create social cohesion.

In promoting employee volunteerism, corporations enable the creation of valuable social capital. In order to maximize the societal benefits, volunteer projects must allow both sides of the volunteer exchange – server and served – to learn from one another. A powerful volunteer exchange is one in which the reciprocal nature of the volunteer experience is evident.

Businesses Can Help

To ensure that volunteers engage in meaningful service with self-discovery and community connection, the public, private, and nonprofit sectors must work together to create intentional structures and support systems. When businesses and volunteer organizations partner, we are better able to solve our community problems. When businesses facilitate and support employee community involvement, the increase in social capital benefits businesses, employees and the community – and ultimately our nation.

Michelle Nunn is President of CityCares, Executive Director of Hands On Atlanta and also serves on the President’s Council on Service and Civic Participation. This article has been modified from pieces published in The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs and The Journal of Volunteer Administration.

WACHOVIA: LEADING THE WAY

Wachovia Corporation has a longstanding commitment to volunteerism. This commitment stems from a simple idea – following the lead of its employees. Wachovia employees have a proud history of volunteer involvement in their communities – reading to school children, walking to raise money for disease research, teaching financial literacy classes and donating blood through the American Red Cross.

As a founding member of Business Strengthening America in 2002, Wachovia strengthened its existing support for the employees who are hard at work in their communities every day. Wachovia expanded its Time Away from Work for Community Service policy, giving more than 80,000 employees four hours per month – or six days per year – of paid time off to volunteer for the causes that matter most to them. The company also launched a new organization called WachoviaVolunteers! to encourage and support employee volunteer initiatives at the local level.

Wachovia’s wholehearted support of its employees’ volunteer efforts results from the recognition that while every individual volunteer makes a difference, by working together, Wachovia employees can have a profound positive impact in their communities.



WORKPLACE VOLUNTEERING IS GOOD BUSINESS

Robert K. Goodwin

There has never been a better – or more necessary – time for businesses to take strong leadership roles in their communities. Some businesses are responding to the President's call to service. And, more than ever, many businesses are recognizing that corporate social responsibility and good corporate citizenship have become deciding factors for consumers in choosing and buying brands. In an environment clouded by terrorism, war, a weakened economy, the public's waning trust in institutions and recent corporate-accounting scandals, more Americans are demanding that companies play an active role in supporting social causes.

What Customers Want

The majority of 25,000 people interviewed in 23 countries want companies to contribute to society beyond making a profit, according to the Millennium Poll on Corporate Social Responsibility. A Cone Corporate Citizenship Study indicated that 75% of Americans surveyed in 1997 said they would consider switching to a company involved with a good cause, all other things being equal; in 2002 that number was up to 91%. Many companies are responding by establishing or expanding workplace volunteer programs.

When strategically integrated within business operations, employee volunteer programs can bring about a number of value-added benefits to the business, the employees and the communities in which they operate. Increasingly, com-

panies of all sizes are viewing corporate citizenship efforts, especially workplace volunteer programs, not as add-ons but as strategic business investments. And, companies are seeking ways to expand beyond financial contributions to give more time and talents of their employees, which in some cases can be more valuable to community organizations than cash donations.

With a robust talent pool of 114 million employees in an estimated 5 million U.S. corporations and 57 million employees in 23 million small businesses nationwide, there is a tremendous opportunity for companies and their employees to make a significant impact in their local communities. The 2001 Giving and Volunteering survey, conducted by the nonprofit Independent Sector, reported

THE HELPER'S HIGH

Allan Luks

A body of research shows that helping others—but only a certain kind of helping—significantly reduces stress and enhances personal health.

This helping requires personal contact with those helped, repetition at least every other week, and involves helping strangers rather than just family or friends. Such volunteers, scientists say, are focusing out of themselves. It's the same way meditation works – and these volunteers are also experiencing the release of the body's stress-reducing chemicals. Runners who do personal-contact helping report similar highs from both. In volunteering, it's called the helper's high.

Unfortunately, only about 13 percent of Americans do face-to-face helping. While the main reason cited is lack of time, research and the experience of organizations like Big Brothers Big Sisters of New York City, shows there's no difference in the amount of time spent working or on leisure between volunteers and non-volunteers of similar backgrounds.

A few people are volunteer self-starters; but most people say they considered volunteering for years before they did it. Infrequent calls to volunteer by charities, religious groups, business, and the media simply aren't enough to inspire more widespread volunteering.

A new national survey by the nondenominational Spirituality & Health magazine shows a majority of Americans would consider becoming personal-contact volunteers if: they could do it while at work (they support tax deductions for companies that allow this), received health insurance premium deductions, or saw public leaders—who often speak about helping—periodically visiting the needy and ill.

Allan Luks, Executive Director of Big Brothers Big Sisters in New York City, is a nationally recognized leader in social and health services. He is author of The Healing Power of Doing Good.

CITYCARES: FOR PEOPLE AND COMPANIES THAT CARE

The CityCares network helps civic-minded companies organize hands-on programs to facilitate employee volunteer service in over 30 local communities across the country. CityCares can help your company create innovative employee involvement programs that make a meaningful difference in the community. To get involved in your community as an organization or an individual, learn more about the national network, and find a local affiliate in your community visit www.CityCares.org.

that the volunteer contribution of the formal volunteer workforce was worth \$239 billion, equivalent to over 9 million full-time employees.

Business Benefits

Points of Light conducted a survey in 1999 of more than 2,770 U.S. business leaders and found that 81% of the respondents were focusing their employee volunteer programs on core business functions. This reflects a remarkable shift in how companies view their volunteer programs. In the 1992 benchmark study, only 31% were using employee volunteer programs to address core business functions.

Further research has shown that employee volunteer programs result in a number of benefits such as enhanced image for their business, increased brand awareness, customer loyalty, better team-building skills, heightened employee morale, and

healthier communities in which to do business – the same communities where employees work and live. A socially responsible business with strong workplace volunteering can help distinguish a company from its competitors.

Other positive aspects of employee volunteer programs are that any company can do them – and companies, employees and communities alike benefit from them. All businesses, regardless of size or industry, can play a role in giving back to their communities by providing

volunteering opportunities to their employees. Employee volunteer programs can immerse employees in their local communities, helping to improve those communities through volunteer projects such as rebuilding parks and homes, feeding the homeless, cleaning the streets, and tutoring children and adults for skill improvement that helps reduce illiteracy.

To ensure success, it is essential that all levels of management are advocates of workplace volunteering, that the appropriate policies and procedures are in place and that the employee volunteer program is well-suited to the company's culture and mission. Creating, sustaining and managing a business environment that encourages and promotes volunteering allows organizations to "do good" – and, at the same time, reap the benefits of transforming laudable values into tangible results. It is a win-win-win strategy for businesses, employees, and their communities.

Robert K. Goodwin is President and CEO of the Points of Light Foundation. For more information on how to integrate an employee volunteer program within your business, visit www.PointsofLight.org.



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WHAT BUSINESSES CAN DO:

- > Assess the needs of your community by reaching out to local agencies such as Volunteer Centers, United Way, City Cares, or a local Corporate Volunteer Council. Determine with these local agencies what community needs are unmet and consider resources your business can contribute.
- > Align a company group volunteer project with a national day of service such as Make a Difference Day or National Family Volunteer Day. For more information on national service days, visit www.pointsoflight.org/events/seasons.cfm.
- > Survey employees to determine their volunteer interests. Where are they currently volunteering, what types of volunteer projects interest them, what social issues would they like to focus on?

WHAT EMPLOYEES CAN DO:

- > Host a brown-bag lunch to gather like-minded employees to discuss ways the company can be involved in the community. Then, take recommendations to senior management.
- > Speak with your human resources, community relations, or communications staff to discuss benefits, policies and procedures for developing an employee volunteer program.
- > Conduct a group volunteer project with co-workers within your department or others and show your company how interested employees are in volunteering.