



TWIN CITIES

Promoting Workplace Volunteerism

2010 Awards Luncheon and 30th Anniversary Celebration

April 29, 2010

Keynote Address by Jeff Hoffman

Follow-Up Questions

1. What strategies would you suggest to more effectively recruit and engage employee volunteers?

Demonstrate that the work is important! Show that their participation will make a difference. Ensure that they know the expected outcomes and their deliverables. Give them the tools and training they need to accomplish the assigned tasks. Expectation management! The best recruitment tool is word of mouth. A good experience will lead to more participants. A bad experience will be a detriment. Water cooler conversations can make or break a program! Communicate the personal experiences of the volunteers.

2. For my organization, recruitment is easiest during the holiday season. How do you encourage or get the word out that nonprofits need support year-round?

Education! Homeless people are hungry every day, not just on Thanksgiving. This is a challenging issue for both volunteer programs as well as the nonprofits. Communicate the need: do creative programs such as Thanksgiving one day a month to get them into the holiday spirit in an off time. The true goal is to develop a continuum of service. Holiday activities can help bring the first-time volunteer in, but then the goal is for them to see the organizations and the people they serve. Change the conversation from a guilt relief during the holiday to the holiday spirit of giving year-round.

3. What was the best way to organize “champions” for volunteerism at many, disparate office locations (e.g., did Disney have a volunteer council at each location, or a regional volunteer council, other)?

Appoint champions! Disney has office locations across the country and around the world of all sizes and types of businesses. A champion can be the managing director of the office or a passionate administrative assistant. The key is to understand the business taking place in that location, what are the needs of that community, the demographics of the office. Localize the program. Make it relevant for that location and at the same time, it helps them to feel connected with the greater company. Be sure to highlight the disparate offices in communications so the story is not always about the headquarters chapter! Councils are encouraged in locations with a sizable staff.

4. Being involved in worldwide volunteerism, how did you or what advice would you give to best engage cultures where volunteerism is not as culturally ingrained?

Learn the culture! Find what adapts. In Scandinavia, for instance, these countries are highly socialized and the government takes care of most/all of those in need, but we learned early on that helping put a smile on a child's face in a hospital while they are going through some horrible treatment is universal. I remember when we set up our VoluntEARS program in France in the early '80s. Our

head of community relations in Paris would go to NGOs and say, “We would like to volunteer with you,” and they would answer, “Why?” Now the VoluntEARS program at Disneyland Resort Paris is very successful. Oftentimes it is about going to the organization and being specific. We have employees who would like to do this. Do you have a need for this? I am finding that a non-understanding or appreciation of volunteering is becoming rarer, that in most countries you will find organizations that want and need the help. Check with the International Association of Volunteer Efforts for their in-country contact, and work with them on making meaningful connections.

5. How important, or valuable, is it to have a signature volunteer project?

This really depends on the culture and strategy of a company. If you are a retailer, or have a consumer product, where you want your customers to easily associate the brand with a cause and the good works of the company, a signature program is an easier way to accomplish this association. If it is a signature program with the shared values of the company and its employees, it can be a good way to rally the employees to get involved. My only caution with employees is that there needs to be balance so that the employee doesn't feel that their volunteering is nothing more than a marketing campaign built on the backs of the employees!

6. In your experience, what is the value of branding your volunteer program (e.g., Disney VoluntEARS)?

I think branding your volunteer program is very important to the program, the employees and the company. In the community, Disney VoluntEARS has a stellar reputation. It shows a company's commitment to the community and to its employees. It makes it easier for the company to shine a spotlight on the good work that the employees are doing. The employees feel a part of something bigger, a team. It sets the program on its own in internal communications. It should contain the company name. I have seen branded programs where you have to look hard to see what company the logo stands for and this is not an effective way of branding. It might be cute or respected internally by those in the know, but externally it does nothing to showcase your company in the community.

7. Do you have any tips on how to get other business units (e.g., marketing, HR, communications, government relations) to really integrate community involvement and/or corporate social responsibility into their decision making or their business-as-usual operations? Does that direction always have to come from the top?

Coming from the top helps. If you have senior management support and they have been engaged, you can use that leverage when you are out at meetings with the other groups. Playing to ego also helps. Demonstrate that they are a true leader in the company and not just for their group. It really is about finesse and learning what are the business and personal interests of the executives you are trying to engage. Show the benefit to the company, to the employees and to the productive output of the employees. Over time the support will grow.

8. What advice would you give to community involvement staff looking to attain progressive levels of responsibility or leadership within CSR/corporate citizenship departments?

Corporate citizenship, as it becomes more integrated with company strategy and operations, provides more opportunity for staff to gain additional responsibility. This also requires that the staff person have a strong understanding of the overall business and the issues affecting the business in the outside world. Spend time asking leaders what their goals are, what their challenges are, how corporate citizenship can benefit the business. Be a news junkie. Know what is going on in the world. Be a citizen of the world. To truly rise in the ranks, you must have a strong grasp on the

overall business and what is happening in the world in addition to the skill sets needed in your particular job role.

9. What role do you think CVC should play in the political/policy arena regarding volunteerism?

First, get involved with policy work only when it has a direct correlation to the CVC. And best to stay out of politics, especially when it involves a candidate. From time to time there is federal, state and local legislation that is related to volunteerism, and service. On the national level, I advocate for the full funding of the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act as authorized. The CVC can advocate for this with members of Congress. On the state level, it could be everything from wage and hour laws that could be a barrier to volunteering, the structure of the state service commission and potential tax issues. Locally, it could involve Cities of Service, support for local HandsOn affiliates, etc. Volunteering and service is usually nonpartisan. Strong support from the business community can help move issues forward.

10. How many more years would the Twin Cities need to be named “No. 1 in Volunteerism” before we’d be able to officially strip the state of Tennessee of its name “The Volunteer State”? (I think this one is a joke!)

Well, with all due respect to my friends in Tennessee, I do think you have earned this title. This is probably a job for your legislature. According to the official website of the state of Tennessee, the nickname The Volunteer State comes from the record number of volunteers the state provided during the War of 1812. Now as commendable as that is, it is now 2010! And you are still the land of 10,000 lakes.