

Be Sure to Include Your Volunteer Work on Your Resume

I recently read an very interesting article in a recent issue of e-Volunteerism, the Electronic Journal of the Volunteer Community¹, by Louise Polis, a professional resume writer. According to her, volunteer activities are a “valuable asset” that can reflect skills and strengths gained through unpaid work. It tells the prospective employer that you are “willing to try new experiences, be involved in the community, take initiative...”

Examples given:

New college/university graduates usually have had an assortment of low-paying jobs to pay their way through school. As a volunteer, they may have gained leadership skills, done research, been involved with neighborhood development.

For someone who has been out of the job market, volunteer experience can show current skills.

If the volunteer experience is going to be vital in getting a job, Ms. Polis recommends “*strategic placement*” in the resume. It “should be presented with the same value, importance and level of achievement” as employment. One option with the chronological style resume, is to present the volunteering along with paid work in reverse date order (most recent experience first).

This is particularly appropriate for return-to-work mothers and retirees, because it “highlights” what they have been doing since their last paid position; also for students – “it places valuable volunteering...experience front and centre”.

She suggests preparing a “*service statement*,” which includes the volunteer position title, duties/responsibilities; skills required; dates of service; number of hours; evaluation of performance. Numbers grab the reader’s attention.

Particularly for teens/post secondary students, I keep track of the total number of hours volunteered by the individual and their “grade point average” from their performance evaluation. I routinely use this information for any letters of reference/applications to graduate/medical school, etc., that I am asked to do.

Don’t forget to include volunteer experience on job applications and in job interviews. If asked for salary, fill in “unsalaried”.

Show the relevancy of the volunteer work: did it show leadership, initiative; your rapport with others; that you are a team player?

I can speak first-hand about volunteer work on a resume. After being a stay-at-home mom for sixteen years, I answered the want ad in The Observer for a volunteer co-ordinator. The Centre wanted someone with “experience as a volunteer”. I was hired,

¹ Polis, Loieuse, “Volunteer Experience Is Valuable in Today’s Job Market: A Workshop on How to Present Volunteer Activities on Resume”, e-Volunteerism, vol. IX, Issue 3, April 14-July 14, 2009

based on my page-long resume of all my volunteer work: chairing committees; serving on the executive of non-profit groups; putting on special events; fundraising; producing an award-winning newsletter; serving as a 'volunteer' volunteer co-ordinator, etc.

Any experience, whether paid or unpaid, can be an asset and a growth opportunity. Remember to present it that way on your resume!

---Annette Urban
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