

Building A Stronger Company Through Employee Volunteerism

By Whitney Munn, President of the Metro Atlanta Corporate Volunteer Council

Amidst the current drought, Atlantans today know all too well the serious impact that a depletion of critical resources can make. In a business, employee time and productivity are two of its most precious commodities, and, as such, the notion that a company can achieve success by giving some of those resources away to help the community seems completely counterintuitive. Yet, companies that have been able to embrace this concept have oftentimes come out ahead of their competition.

The 2004 Cone Corporate Citizenship Study shows us the importance of corporate community engagement and the impact it can have in protecting and enhancing a company's reputation. Overall, the study proved that more and more people's decisions today are influenced by a company's commitment to social issues - from what products to use and which stores to visit to what companies to work for and stocks in which to invest. Some of the interesting findings include:

- 74% of respondents said a company's commitment to social issues would affect which products and services they'd recommend to other people.
- 70% said it would influence their investments.
- 86% said they would likely switch from one brand to another similar in price and quality if they knew the other brand was associated with a cause.

In today's market, the current economic downturn has resulted in company budgets shrinking by the day. However, Employee Volunteer Programs (EVPs) are both cost-effective and time-efficient. EVP's vary in shape and size depending upon the company, but all maintain a commitment to formally engaging employees in the community.

An Employee Volunteer Program also improves employee morale, assists in the recruitment of new employees, and provides professional development opportunities for employees. Even more, an EVP enhances a company's image in the community while improving its reputation among investors and consumers.

If you are interested in developing an EVP at your company, be sure to keep five critical steps* in mind to ensure it will be a success:

2. **Take a strategic approach-** Clearly identify your goals and what you hope to achieve for your company, its employees and the community.
3. **Build a conceptual framework for your program-** If you want to use your EVP to assist with recruiting, design your program and respective metrics that speak to that outcome.
4. **Inventory your existing metrics-** Identify what is currently being used in your company to measure success (e.g., employee satisfaction surveys) and try to piggyback on those existing measures.
5. **Find the metric gaps and modify as necessary-** Make sure all goals are measurable and adjust goals if you find there are gaps in program design and measurement.

6. **Engage key stakeholders-** Invite both key company staff and individuals who are invested in your company to help you develop your EVP and determine how its success will be measured.

The mark of a good company is how it conducts itself in times of crisis *and* prosperity. It is more critical now than ever for companies to differentiate themselves from their competitors. Demonstrate your company's commitment to the Atlanta community by making sure corporate volunteerism is part of your business strategy.

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**"Measuring Employee Volunteer Programs: The Human Resources Model," produced by the Center for Corporate Citizenship at Boston College and the Points of Light Foundation (2005)*