* GET RESUME CREDIT FOR VOLUNTEERING! *

Take credit for all of your life accomplishments. Just because you were not paid, do not relegate your volunteer experience to the end of your resume.

As anyone who has ever crammed volunteer work into a life full of work and family obligations will attest: volunteering IS WORK! So why not include it on your resume?

You should. People often choose volunteer work which either:

- 1) <u>Capitalizes on their strengths or their professional field</u>. For example: a lawyer offering pro bono services to low income families.
- 2) <u>Fills a need or interest that the person does not get from their paid job</u>. For example: a computer programmer who is an assistant youth soccer coach.

In both cases, valuable accomplishments and refined skills result from the volunteer work. Who cares whether you were paid?

SHIFT YOUR MINDSET ABOUT VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

KEY POINT: In reality, a potential employer doesn't care whether any of your experience allowed you to be paid very well, very poorly or not at all. What they do care about is, "So, what's in it for me? How will this help MY business?" That is the unspoken question your resume must answer.

When you start to categorize your volunteer experiences as work, you will see that the exact same principles governing how we showcase paid experience are also used for volunteer experience.

The question to consider is, "How have your volunteer experiences made you into a better potential employee? Are you now more skilled, better rounded, a better leader, negotiator or team player?"

The raw truth is that companies hire new employees for only 3 reasons:

- 1) Make the company money
- 2) Save the company money
- 3) Improve the efficiency of the company (which ultimately saves or makes money too). You have to PROVE you will provide value to the company.

So how do you translate volunteer experience to your resume? There are 3 major steps to follow:

1) TAKE THE RELEVANCY TEST

One of my favorite words when it comes to resume writing is the word "RELEVANT". Ask yourself, "Does this experience communicate something that enhances my employability to a potential employer?" Or is it just a "nice to know?" Or worse, "Does it detract from a certain focus and make me appear scattered?"

Let's look at an example. Let's say you were the #1 Seller of Girl Scout cookies in your troop. Should this information go on your resume?

Answer: it depends (it always depends). If the candidate was a 50-year-old attorney... well, no, it doesn't belong. It's too long ago, and doesn't add much to the career skills needed. It is not **RELEVANT**.

Now, what if the candidate was a 20-year-old trying to get a sales position, or someone trying to get a job with Girl Scouts of America? In those cases, well, then YES, that accomplishment could become **RELEVANT**.

Bottom line: include volunteer experience on your resume where it provides a specific example of a skill you have, or a wonderful personal trait such as creativity or team leadership, when those traits are valued in the position you are seeking.

2) DON'T JUST LIST IT: EXPLAIN IT!

Another common mistake people make in using volunteer experience on the resume is to simply list it like this:

- --Little League Coach
- --PTA member
- -- Red Cross Volunteer

Yawn. When I see this I am tempted to say "So what?" Those statements might mean you showed up for a few baseball games, paid your PTA dues and maybe served juice at a Red Cross blood drive once 10 years ago. . . Without a detailed explanation, employers will probably assume you did very little. Now, look at the contrast below once we explain the experience:

- --Coached Little League team to its first winning season in 6 years through improving morale/sense of fun and teaching basic skills
- --Spearheaded quarterly PTA Bake Sale which raised funds for desperately needed new band uniforms
- --Gave monthly 30-minute presentations on the importance of blood drives to community organizations

Notice that the kinds of skills needed to achieve the above accomplishments could easily apply to a paid workplace instead of a community/nonprofit organization. These include leadership, enthusiasm, patience, teamwork, initiative, planning, and public speaking.

So on your resume do not just list the name of the organization you volunteered for. That is like simply listing the names of the companies you worked for with no details. How could that help an employer make a decision to interview you?

3) POSITION IT CORRECTLY

One of the old resume-writing rules was that you had to list all volunteer experience under its own heading at the end of the resume. Usually the title of the section was something like "VOLUNTEER WORK" or "ASSOCIATIONS & ORGANIZATIONS."

If your volunteer work has passed the relevancy test and you have specific accomplishments that enhance your candidacy, consider folding your volunteer experience into the body of the resume. The simplest way to do this is by placing it before/after/alongside paid work experience. Title the entire section "PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE," instead of "Work Experience" or "Work History."

The bottom line is that volunteer work can be a valuable addition to your credentials if handled properly. Give yourself the credit and present your future employer with the facts that prove you will be an excellent and skilled team player.

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