

SABPP FACT SHEET

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EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERING

Introduction

What is Employee Volunteering (EV)? It has been defined as a “planned, managed effort that seeks to motivate and enable employees to effectively serve community needs through the leadership of the employer”¹. There are two main models. The first is that the employer or company builds the volunteering programme internally. The EV Programme will become a component of the company’s internal Corporate Social Investment (CSI) efforts. The other model is where a company links with an outside organisation which provides opportunities for employees to get involved in community initiatives. It would seem that the first model is popular with larger employers who would have full-time staff to coordinate such programmes.

The fact that EV is defined as a planned and managed effort implies that an employer official has to somehow plan and manage the programme, even if only to identify and work with the external organisation. This role is normally assigned to the Human Resources department, so it is critical that HR practitioners understand the concept and its power to make a positive difference to many factors of the employer-employee relationship and organisation performance.

This Fact Sheet will give some background to Employee Volunteering, explain how it works and give case studies and practical tips to implementing best practice in Employee Volunteering.

¹ “Seven Practices of EVP’s”, Points of Light, Business 4 Better, The Community Partnership Movement. May 1 – 2, 2013. See www.pointsoflight.org/sites/default/files/corporate-institute/ubm_b4b_whitepaper8.pdf

Background

Employee volunteering has been around for some time but appears to be gaining ground as companies discover the myriad of opportunities and benefits for all concerned – the employer, employee volunteers, community organisations, Non Profit Organisations (NPO's) and the people in communities who are beneficiaries of the volunteering initiatives themselves. As will be described later, these benefits are far-reaching and serve to increase commitment to EV.

Some point to the development of EV as a response to declining budgets available for CSI initiatives during tough economic conditions. An alternative was then to offer the skills and services of staff instead. For many years, teams in organisations have, for example, instead of the usual end of year function, offered their labour to paint classrooms, build structures, clean up littered areas and the like. The nature of the offering appears to have changed over the years and now the focus is more on skills transfer to community programs and NPO's.

Outline of EV programmes

So what do EV programmes look like? In some organisations, employees are given 2 – 3 days extra paid leave for volunteering. Companies either link up with an intermediary organisation that can refer them to community programmes that require volunteer assistance or the company has an internally developed EV programme as part of their CSI initiatives. Here, community projects selected are aligned with CSI objectives and may include infrastructure development, job creation or skills development. Employees from all divisions are encouraged to volunteer. One strategic objective of an EVP could be to develop the competencies of small businesses in order for them to become suppliers to the organisation thereby increasing the scope of procurement opportunities.

Transnet² has given as examples of their EV initiatives the following:

- Adult Basic Education and Training
- Painting homes and other buildings
- Book keeping at schools
- Developing business plans for Non-Governmental Organisations or schools
- Sports coaching at schools
- Volunteering at Recreational Centers
- Food gardens.

In addition Transnet list the following as the employee skills that are utilised in their EV programme:

- Computer Skills
- Finance Management
- Artisan Skills
- Technical Skills
- Engineering Skills

² See www.transnetfoundation.co.za/csi

- Business Administration
- Project Management
- Environmental Management

Advantages of having an EV programme

The many advantages of EV programmes are outlined in numerous articles. Perhaps one of the most comprehensive set of the benefits is explicated in a publication called “The Seven Practices of EVP’s” written by the Community Partnership Movement (referenced previously). The point is made that EV programmes are no longer afterthoughts or “nice gestures”. Gone are the times when they were run by a few individuals passionate about volunteering. As the benefits were experienced, more systematic ways were found to build on EV programmes to gain the full set of advantages for all concerned. The benefits as outlined below are reproduced from the reference.

1. EV improves corporate image and relationships with stakeholders through the positioning of the company as a leader in giving back at local and national levels.
2. EV develops and enhances employees’ professional and leadership skills through the tasks undertaken within the EV initiatives.
3. EV supports specific business functions mostly in the areas of Human Resources and External Relations. This is due to the impact on employees and external stakeholders.
4. EV boosts employee morale, team building, loyalty, productivity, motivation, and reduces absenteeism.
5. EV attracts new hires, especially millennials who are keen to get involved in social goals beyond their job descriptions.
6. EV programmes reach more clients, increase sales and have a positive impact on profitability.
7. EV builds stronger communities by addressing social issues in these communities and finding solutions to concerns.
8. EV illustrates organizational values in action.
9. EV demonstrates corporate support for activities that allow employees to
 - a. Spend quality time with their families;
 - b. Be a positive role model and provide learning opportunities for children;
 - c. Educate their families about their workplace, co-workers and the importance of good corporate citizenship
10. EV leverages contribution money and therefore enhances the impact of financial contributions.

In discussing the benefits of EV a great deal is written about the positive impact on Employee Engagement. This is juxtaposed with research that has shown that a high number of workers are in fact disengaged from their current positions. Their connection with their world of work is limited and thus productivity and

morale are not high. Scott³ makes a case for this, adding that, in addition, replacing disengaged workers who choose to leave their jobs is expensive. He argues the following points:

- EV lends purpose and meaning to employees. If they are given the chance to give back they may have a renewed appreciation for the importance of their jobs.
- EV is a significant tool for employee recruitment and retention. Scott contends that having pride in their work will mean employees will remain in their jobs. It also helps to attract top talent. He offers the results of a study done by Deloitte which showed that EV programmes are important even to those who do not usually volunteer in their private time. 61% of millennials who rarely or never volunteer said they would consider an employer's commitment to the community when making a decision about a job.
- EV provides a strong platform for leadership and skills development as programmes allow workers to expand their skills, build on their strengths and connect with their communities. Scott adds that EV can help develop soft skills that are good for the business environment, such as problem solving, mentoring and communication. He makes the point that such programmes offer a neutral space for employee training and growth at a relatively low cost to the company.

In a similar vein, an Internet article on the business case for employee volunteering⁴ highlights that an engaged workforce is important for the employer's wellbeing and profitability. The article goes on to say that research has shown that employees who volunteer report an improved perception of their employer as well as a higher level of commitment to the organisation. In addition, volunteers show a more positive attitude towards their co-workers, as well as improved physical and emotional health. It is argued that this is because EVP's facilitate the opportunity to express their personal interests and desires that go beyond their jobs.

Examples of EV Programmes

First Rand

The First Rand Volunteers' Programme⁵ has begun an initiative called "Beyond Painting Classrooms" with partners CAF Southern Africa, GIBS and the Mail & Guardian. While it does not discourage traditional volunteering activities, it aims to encourage new and innovative ways of volunteering that create sustainable improvements within the NPO's and improve the skill levels of NPO staff. The idea is to transfer professional and technical skills to NPO staff. However, the point is made that there is mutual learning – volunteers also pick up skills and experiences and thus skills transfer is not one directional. Indeed, as the writers say, successful relationships require mutual respect and commitment over extended periods of time. Success depends on mutually agreed objectives and well managed projects. A related point is that the NPO's should act as equal partners and remain in control of the activities of the various projects. To

³ Scott, R., 16 February 2012 See www.causecast.com/blog/how-corporate-volunteer-programs-increase-employee-engagement

⁴ The Business Case for Employee Volunteering. See www.realizedworth.com/2011/06/business-case-for-employee-volunteering.html

⁵ See mg.co.za/article/2014-03-12-employee-volunteers-contribute-to-skills-development-in-south-africa

facilitate a positive intervention, volunteers are trained on how to volunteer – what behaviour is required to conduct themselves as partners, as well as their roles and responsibilities. The article concludes by stating that clear ground rules for engagement are required to ensure that the needs of both parties are met and that there is a need for an honest assessment of the “fit” between the strategies of the company and the requirements of the NPO.

Nedbank and other organisations with Partners for Possibility

Mandy Collins’ book *Partners for Possibility*⁶ describes how, once a member of an organisation is partnered with a school principal under this programme, that partner often involves other members of staff as the needs arise. For example, Nedbank Retail in Gauteng was able to contribute the skills and knowledge of the Sustainability Manager, a financial manager, staff who “delivered a rainwater harvesting tank, vegetable tunnel and solar cookers to the school, and also spent a morning there teaching them to use and maintain the school’s new food-generating facilities”. In Cape Town, Prudential staff gave talks at career workshops. Rogz, a pet gear supplier also in Cape Town, hosted a lunch for the management team of a local school at which the company’s staff could network and identify partnering possibilities; the IT staff helped with connectivity problems; and a combined team rebuilt the jungle gym. Some trainers from Virgin Active ran a fun session with Grade 7’s on Mandela Day. SageVIP staff ran a maths champion programme and a maths triathlon day. Vodacom staff organised a bulk emailing system for a school to inform them of parent/care-giver events.

Linkages between EV and other organisational processes

An article by Franklin⁷ explores further the idea of EV being at the intersection of CSI and Human Resources (HR). He makes the point that for the CSI team, public volunteering highlights the company’s commitment to its local community. For the HR team, all the benefits to employees mentioned earlier in this Fact Sheet are mentioned; these include offering volunteers developmental opportunities, building teamwork and boosting morale. These are above the personal gains that volunteers receive such as increased self-confidence and skills in leadership, project management and communication.

Franklin goes on to point out that in some companies, volunteering is linked to performance reviews and would be included in the review scorecard. In this way, employees link their volunteering efforts with their development plans and have discussions with their line managers about what volunteering means for them over the next year.

7 Practices for an effective Employee Volunteering Programme

⁶ Reviewed in HR Voice February 2015. 2015. Published by Knowledge Resources

⁷ Franklin, G., Director of Programs and Employee Volunteering, Business in the Community (BITC), 14 May 2013. See www.hrzone.com/engage/manage/employee-volunteering-where-csr-and-hr-meet

Finally, returning to the document on “The Seven Practices of EVP’s” previously referenced, the authors offer 7 practices that make for an effective EV programme. These points are taken directly from the document.

1. The Plan

Effective EV programmes have specific societal, employee and business goals. These are linked with clear strategies, focused efforts and tactics to meet the goals. Usually there will be an annual planning and strategic process which would include looking at the measurement of the EV programme’s impact and outcomes.

2. Measurement

High performing EV programmes measure their processes and impact, outputs and accomplishments as well as business and social goals. Results are shared internally and externally, and would include both quantitative and qualitative measures. An example of the latter would be employee morale. Measurement would include the number of days employees have spent volunteering. Importantly, the effects on the NPO’s are considered – such as were they able to serve more people, offer higher quality services or remain open for more hours?

3. Design

The design of the EV programme would integrate it into the business by utilizing employee skills and corporate assets, such as in-kind donations, equipment, real estate and other physical assets. This would align the EV programme with core competencies of the business and enhance corporate operations.

4. Leadership

The more vociferous continued support of leadership for the EV programme, the more effective it becomes. This promotes the mission, goal and plan of EV throughout the organization.

5. Partnerships

Well performing EV programmes develop strategic partnerships and collaborate with governmental, private and non-profit sectors. The deeper the collaboration, the more effective EV is.

6. Employee Engagement

Employee engagement lies at the heart of EV. The programme has the capacity to generate broad-based employee enthusiasm and support for volunteering. Indicators are those associated with engaged employees, such as retention and productivity. At the nub of the programme is “Give skills, make an impact, and get skills”.

7. Success and Growth

Effective EV programmes recognise, celebrate and communicate their success within the company as well as externally. The idea is to continuously learn from peers, volunteers and partners, reflecting on potential programme improvements.

Conclusion

In conclusion, to quote from Norris and Karls⁸ : “Employee Volunteerism is becoming more prevalent, according to recent research. Why? Because it is a mutually beneficial and sustainable option for companies, NPO’s, individuals, and most importantly, those in need”. Thus all parties concerned appear to benefit enormously and all are “winners” in the process.

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⁸ Norris, J. and Karls, R. “The True Value of Employee Volunteering”, May 22 2014. See www.hreonline.com/HRE/view/story.jhtml?id=534357140