

THE FUTURE OF EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERING

A SHIFT: FROM PROGRAMS TO MOVEMENTS

Programmatic elements such as dollars for doers are important, but they are only one part of enabling program growth and scale. **A social movement, on the other hand, creates its own energy, allowing for exponential growth and impact.** Employee volunteering allows us to go beyond typical efforts of CSR strategies through its unique use of social capital. Corporate volunteering programs help employees use their personal resources for broad social benefits. This means that, locally, a trusted colleague can leverage business assets and support to enhance and increase cooperation in volunteering activities.

These actions are akin to social movements that are a “purposive and collective attempt of a number of people to change individuals or societal institutions and structures.” **To start social movements that can begin to address many of the far-reaching social issues of today, it’s essential to mobilize people, raise funds, and, most importantly, establish legitimacy.** Organizing employees and making use of numerous types of resources position corporations to play a key role in broadly addressing contemporary global concerns.

Programmatic elements are an important part of the process but they are a ‘stop on the way’ to something far more significant – a social movement within the definable culture of a company. This approach allows for multiple benefits to accrue such as:

- A stronger participation in prosocial shared values across the company
- An integrated approach to corporate community investment whereby business goals, such as improved diversity and inclusion, may be realized in the immersive learning environment of employee volunteering
- Intrinsic motivation among employees to ‘own the movement’ rather than just participate in company sponsored giving and volunteering events

A MOVE: FROM PARTICIPATION TO AGENCY

Participation is critical to the success of any employee giving and volunteering program but agency is far more important. Instilling a strong sense of agency in employees to make a difference, and teaching employees behaviors that create change is the key to generating long-term, meaningful participation and measurable impact.

In the social sciences, **agency is both the feeling of choice or self-determination coupled with the ability or resources to act accordingly.** Most employee giving and volunteering programs are measured according to participation rates; how many employees, how much money, how many hours, how many students helped, etc. These are important output metrics but they are a ‘stop on the way’ to the more important result of agency. This is achieved by shifting from a primarily transactional model of giving and volunteering to a **Transformative Approach.** In doing so, the primary metrics of success are **focused on the employee,** which results in agency:



PSYCHOLOGICAL

Changes in understanding of the self, measured in ‘how I perceive myself and my role in the world and my ability to make a meaningful contribution’. This produces leaders who exhibit improved situational awareness, increased sense of competency, improved creativity innovation, empathetic leadership, and improved engagement by creating proximity to beneficiaries.



CONVICTIONAL

Revision of belief systems and knowledge frameworks measured in how willing I am to admit and critically examine my implicit bias and worldview. The result of such critical reflection produces adaptability, resilience, inclusive leadership and the ability to maintain a sense of meaning in mundane moments and insights resulting from new frameworks of perception.



BEHAVIORAL

Changes in the decision making process that determine our actions and influence our lifestyle. The benefits of such behavior changes in the workplace would be a further breakdown of silos across enterprise, proactively sharing knowledge, diversity of voice and experience, investment in team success over individual success, effective and mutually beneficial partnerships, empathetic perspectives.



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A CHANGE: FROM HELPING TO BELONGING

In a transactional model of giving and volunteering people use terms like “helping” or “doing.” There is a strong sense of ‘making a difference’ by making changes to the world. These are important terms and we should be compelled to help when we can. But a transformative model focuses on **the change that takes place in the person helping as well as the person being helped.** This focus helps volunteers move to a sense of belonging. This feeling happens as the barriers between “us and them” break down, allowing for deeper human connection and, ultimately, greater impact. When we are all on the same playing field, it is no longer a choice to be complicit.

The **Transformative Approach** allows us to reach beyond the immediate, transactional contexts and circumstances of volunteers and their communities. Instead of just exchanging time and resources for the reward of making a difference, **the volunteer experience becomes an internalized journey – the “reward” becomes pro-social human beings with a greater capacity for empathy.** When we ‘belong’ to each other in a community, we address the underlying obstacles to peace and prosperity; the idea of ‘us’ and ‘them’. Neuroscience demonstrates the deep evolutionary reasons humans fear the stranger and protect ourselves from others. So we must move beyond this posture of charitable helping the ‘other’ while maintaining our separateness. We must know the solidarity of humanity.



“HOMELESSNESS, HUNGER, AND DISEASE IS NOT ‘THEIR’ PROBLEM. IT IS OUR PROBLEM AS A NEIGHBORHOOD. AS A COUNTRY. AS A SPECIES. THE PROBLEM BELONGS TO ALL OF US AND WE BELONG TO EACH OTHER.”

WHAT NEXT?

Here are some important steps you can take to get your program moving in a direction that doesn’t mean a strain on your time, budget, or resources.

- Reallocate a portion of community investment funds to train key employee leaders to increase participation and measureable impact
- Formalize employee volunteering training processes and materials across the enterprise through learning management systems designed specifically for employee volunteering and giving
- Adopt a Transformative Approach to create greater agency among employees while tying the results to business priorities
- Move from a change management and promotion strategy of ‘emails and conference calls’ as part of a new program to employee empowerment by tapping into the intrinsic motivation of a social movement

Employee volunteering and giving programs must become something more than the simple provision of a service. Done correctly, these practices can transform our values and how we perceive ourselves in new and challenging contexts; they can also expand how we perceive and empathize with others – some of the most fundamental qualities of an excellent leader.

ABOUT REALIZED WORTH

Realized Worth is a global agency that specializes in employee volunteer training, program design, and employee engagement. Call us toll-free at **1-855-926-4678** to discuss opportunities for your company, or shoot us an email at contact@realizedworth.com.

