

Volunteering May Help Your Career More Than You Think

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Think organizing your church's annual potluck or volunteering at the local homeless shelter means squat when it comes to your resume and job search? Think again. Charity and volunteer work could be key to landing your next job, particularly if you learn transferable skills, according to a [new LinkedIn survey](#). It might sound like a no-brainer, but less than half of people surveyed by LinkedIn included volunteer gigs on their resume, even though the vast majority had volunteering experience.

"Professionals often have the misconception that volunteer work doesn't qualify as 'real' work experience," Nicole Williams, LinkedIn's connection director, said in a press release. But just because a job doesn't pay doesn't mean you don't benefit. Individuals glean plenty of tangible skills and experience from charity work, Williams says. For example, even if you're a salesperson by trade, organizing a nonprofit fundraising event requires event planning, time management and marketing, skills professionals should highlight on their resume regardless of their field. While professionals often overlook or underestimate the value of volunteer work, the exposure to varied skill sets that charity work provides can make you a more versatile, attractive employee, not to mention a [more competitive job seeker](#). In fact, 41 percent of hiring authorities surveyed by LinkedIn rated volunteer experience equally as important as paid experience. "Given the current economic climate and the hypercompetitive job market, it's essential to include your volunteer work on your profile," Williams says. "When hiring managers or business partners are comparing two people side by side, volunteer experience makes you a more multifaceted professional and can set you apart from the competition."

Here are some tips and advice on how to best showcase your volunteer experience:

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the title, color, and outline the skills you used — and gained — such as problem solving or counseling.

The fact that the work you did was unpaid should appear in the job description, but first grab the potential employer's attention with an accurate job title.

Describe your charity work in terms of achievements.

This is especially important when [tailoring your resume](#) to submit for a particular position. Frame your volunteer experience to highlight the skills most important and applicable to the job you're applying to. For example, did you supervise a staff or committee of volunteers? That requires a variety of skills, from time management to motivation. Did your volunteer work require you to speak publicly or write press releases and promotional materials? These skills apply to almost any position and impress employers, so make sure to draw attention to them.

Volunteer work should supplement, not distract.

Many young professionals have had numerous internships and volunteer posts or held positions in countless clubs and student groups. So it's easy for volunteer work to overwhelm professional accomplishments on a resume. While it's important for employers to get a full picture of your skills and attributes, be picky about the charity work you include on your resume. "A resume is meant to show a potential employer what you've proven you can do," Ellis says. "It is not meant to be a recitation of every job you've ever held." Use your volunteer work to [serve a purpose](#), whether to indicate activity between formal positions or underscore skills applicable to the position you want.

Integrate volunteer experience into the main body of your resume.

Unless job seekers have a specific reason for segregating volunteer experience and other professional experience, unpaid experience should appear alongside paid experience, experts say. Not only does that help give volunteer work experience the same weight as a paid job, but it helps build a seamless chronological progression of work experience, which is key to impressing employers. That's especially important when paid jobs are separated by stretches of volunteer work. "Most employers look for continuity and growth as a worker changes jobs," Mary Agnes Williams, an employment and administrative services consultant, wrote in a [recent Energize article](#). "Time that is not accounted for on the resume waves a 'red flag,' which can jeopardize the applicant's chances for consideration." [Meg Handley](#) is a [writer and online journalist](#) who covers a wide range of money and business topics

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