

Businesses find worker volunteerism helps 'third bottom line'

BY SHERRI BEGIN
CRAIN'S DETROIT BUSINESS

A new study by **Deloitte L.L.P.** suggests many companies may be missing the opportunity to leverage volunteerism to develop business and leadership skills. Deloitte surveyed 250 human resource managers from Fortune 500 companies across the U.S. in February as part of its 2008 Impact Survey.

About 91 percent of those surveyed agreed that skill-based volunteerism — applying one's expertise in areas like technology, business strategy, human resources or finance to a nonprofit's operations on a pro bono basis — can actually sharpen that employee's professional and leadership skills.

Yet, just one in six surveyed said they make it a regular practice to intentionally offer skill-based volunteer opportunities for employee development, according to the Deloitte report.

Deloitte and other accounting-financial services firms are taking the findings to heart.

In June, the firm's Detroit office was one of 14 Deloitte offices across the country to hold daylong training sessions for nonprofit CEOs for the first time.

The office invited about 30 nonprofit CEOs, presidents and executive directors to its offices for high-level consulting as part of its ninth year of broader employee volunteer efforts.

Some of the sessions included strategic planning, marketing, retaining employees, board makeup and roles, changes in the new 990 nonprofit tax form, and safeguarding donor information.

"We used to do the manual labor kind of stuff, then three or four years ago started doing skill-based training that was more tactical with things like (teaching) Microsoft Office and (developing) financial systems," said Joe Angileri, managing partner of the Detroit office.

Now, the firm is transferring its business strategy expertise to nonprofits, trying to help them develop long-term strategies.

At the same time, it's getting valuable development for its employees, Angileri said.

"If you're talking to nonprofits about greening and energy conservation, you have to have an understanding of those things."

Applying their professional finance and business consulting skills to nonprofit organizations helps "our employees hone their specific skills, teambuilding and leadership (and) ... network with CEOs of some pretty significant organizations."

"The training that (Deloitte) provided, individually and collectively, certainly (is on) topics that are of interest and vital to the future vitality and success of most nonprofits," said DeWayne Wells, president of **Gleaners Community Food Bank of Southeastern Michigan**.

"We all need to plan better and be more sustainable in our practices. This enables us to receive

training and increase our capacity without incurring the cost of the consulting."

Training is often one of the first things nonprofits cut when budgets are tight, said Kyle Caldwell, president of the **Michigan Nonprofit Association**.

"What we have is increased demand on nonprofits with budget shortages and the economy and state and federal funding (cuts)," he said. "Nonprofits are relying more on their volunteers," including those offering more high-skilled tasks.

Certified public accountants, at-

torneys and bankers have lent their professional expertise to nonprofits through positions on their boards, said Sue Perlin, partner and industry group leader for the not-for-profit services group of **Plante & Moran P.L.L.C.**

But larger companies are increasingly formalizing that volunteerism, she said. While Plante & Moran doesn't have a formal program like Deloitte, "we are doing quite a bit of volunteer work with our clients, and much of it is skills-based," Perlin said.

Roughly 80 percent of the partners in the firm's Southfield office

sit on the boards of local nonprofits that are not their clients. It's something the firm encourages, she said, by including some volunteer time as part of paid time off for employees.

By sitting on boards, employees get to understand how board governance works, and they gain valuable experience on board committees overseeing finance, investment and auditing that they can translate to their work endeavors, Perlin said.

Conversely, experience with nonprofits lends itself to the skills-based volunteerism on boards, she said.

There are also recruiting benefits for offering employees opportunities for skills-based volunteerism. Deloitte and Plante & Moran both say the next generation of employees are interested in the opportunity to combine professional development with volunteerism.

"Historically, business has focused on profits," said Angileri.

"Today, people are more focused on social and environmental responsibility, the 'third bottom line.'"

Sherry Begin: (313) 446-1694, sbegin@crain.com



BCN AdvantageSM



Medicare and more

Don't Let the Waiting Game Shape Your Bottom Line

Save money today!

Ask your Blues agent or sales representative about BCN Advantage.

Blue Care Network of Michigan contracts with the federal government and is a nonprofit corporation and independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association.

As the saying goes, "Time is money." That's especially true when it comes to your company's retiree coverage.

BCN Advantage is the group Medicare Advantage plan with the experience, dedication and accessibility to save you money right now. Our streamlined referral process, comprehensive benefits and wellness programs help keep your retirees healthy and happy.

Our industry-leading expertise is paying off. Realize **significant savings** now.

Blue Care Network of Michigan

MiBCN.com/medicare

H5883_08 O BCNADMA_d_021508

Source Code: CRDB