ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to provide a brief history of corporate/business involvement in volunteerism; to indicate how the pattern of corporate volunteering has changed and is changing; to provide projections for future involvement; and to suggest recommendations for strengthening the participation of corporate volunteers.

Corporate Volunteers

Kathy Straka

INTRODUCTION

Although not identified as "corporate volunteers," business leaders participated in volunteer activities for the good of society throughout our history. Business leaders also were viewed by the public as being community leaders.[1] Society has long held the belief that business leaders have a responsibility to assist with the problems facing society.

HISTORY

One early example of business volunteer involvement was the development of the New York Chamber of Commerce in 1792. This organization, while concentrating on economic concerns related to businesses, sponsored civic improvement projects which reflected an interest in the local community.[2]

In the 1880s and 1890s, various organizations were formed by businessmen in response to consumer concerns. One example is the American Association of Public Accountants formed in 1887. This organization formulated a code of ethics for accountants, and assisted with the establishment of an accounting college. Another example is the National Fire Protection Association started in 1895 by insurance and industrial representatives who worked together to solve problems involving increased fire hazards in factories.[3]

Business leaders also were interested in the development of youth. In the early 1900s, two businessmen organized the first Junior Achievement company to offer young people the opportunity to learn and experience the free enterprise system. By the 1970s, Junior Achievement had programs in 1,100 communities with over 30,000 business people who contributed their time to these programs.[4] This organization continues to be an important part of youth education in this country.

In addition, during the late 1930s and early 1940s, business people developed new volunteer organizations such as the Kiwanis Key Clubs and Circle K Clubs which offered vocational guidance and community service programs to high school and college students.[5]

The prosperity and development experienced after World War I brought with it new safety concerns related to the workplace, home and the automobile. As a means to address these concerns, business leaders participated in the organization of various safety councils. The councils were established to provide education on safety hazards to the public as well as determine ways to eliminate these hazards.[6]

Following World War II, business volunteers broadened the scope of community projects being addressed by local and state Chambers of Commerce. Several of the new projects undertaken by the

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Chambers were assisting with the distribution of polio vaccine, working to eliminate slums, and acting as tourist and convention centers to promote their communities.[7]

In 1952, a United States Supreme Court decision which legalized corporate giving to institutions of higher education re-sulted in growth in corporate volunteerism. In *A. P. Smith Manufacturing Company v. Barlow*, it was determined that a corporation could give a contribution to a college without receiving any benefit from the college. This decision reinforced the commonly held belief that business was responsible to help maintain a healthy society. The Court stated, in part, as follows:

> The contribution here in question is towards a cause which is intimately tied into the preservation of American business and the American way of life. Such giving may be called incidental power, but when it is considered in its essential character, it may well be regarded as a major, though unwritten, corporate power. It is even more than that. In the Court's view of the case, it amounts to a solemn duty.[8]

In 1968, when unemployment was high, President Lyndon B. Johnson requested the business community accept the challenge to improve the unemployment situation. As a result, the National Alliance of Businessmen was formed; 12,500 firms representing eight regions of the United States participated. Member firms located and hired large numbers of hard-core unemployed; the number hired totaled over 100,000 by July 1969. Although government assistance was available, two-thirds of the participating firms declined to accept it.[9]

CORPORATE VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS

In the late 1960s and 1970s some corporations, in recognition of their responsibility to broaden their participation in community activities and society at large, set forth to develop corporate volunteer programs to address these responsibilities. Several of the first large corporations to establish corporate volunteer programs were Levi Strauss & Co. (1968), IBM (1971), Allstate (1972) and Honeywell (1974).[10] Although the main purpose of these programs was to increase the corporation's participation in activities for the common good, an underlying reason was to enhance their public image. During this period, business experienced a decline in public confidence. A 1975 Harris poll indicated that only 15% of those surveyed had confidence in the business leaders, representing a drop of 40% from 1966.[11]

Many corporations now encourage their employees to participate in community volunteer activities. The method of encouragement varies depending upon the corporate volunteer program. For example, some corporations allow an employee time off, ranging from several hours to a year or more, to participate in volunteer activities. Others provide supplies, services, or the use of company facilities for their volunteers. Another common practice is to loan personnel to assist nonprofit organizations. Still other companies support group volunteer activities in their communities or provide information and publicity to employees about volunteer activities. In addition, some companies have included retiree volunteer programs within their corporate volunteer programs.[12]

Another method used to encourage employee volunteerism is a matching gift program which matches an employee's financial contribution to a qualified nonprofit agency with a corporate financial gift. For example, The St. Paul Companies, Inc.'s matching gift program will double match a monetary contribution of an employee who volunteers with an organization for at least 50 hours during a twelve month period.

Due, in part, to the development of corporate volunteer programs, corporations were one of the primary sources of volunteers for nonprofit organizations during

the mid 1970s and 1980s. During this period, employee volunteering represented the greatest area of growth and development in the voluntary sector.[13]

Another impetus to the growth in corporate volunteerism in the 1980s was the Reagan administration's Private Sector Initiative Program which was established to encourage private participation dealing with public problems. Although corporate exectuives at first supported President Ronald Reagan's idea, they soon realized that they did not have the resources to deal with the growing problems which were compounded by the administration's budget cuts to social service projects.[14]

In 1985, there were over 600 major corporations which had organized corporate volunteer programs to encourage the participation of their employees in community service activities. In fact, in VOLUNTEER's 1985 Workplace in the Community survey, more than 200 companies reported that nearly 300,000 of their employees were active volunteers.[15]

In recent years, corporations within communities who share an interest in corporate volunteerism have joined together to form corporate volunteer councils to promote volunteering. These organizations provide a means for corporations to share information regarding volunteer programs, learn about the need for volunteers within the community and work jointly on ways to best meet those needs.[16] In 1986, the Corporate Volunteerism Council of the Minneapolis/St. Paul (Minnesota) Metro Area had 49 member companies, 24 of which had formal corporate volunteer programs.[17] By 1989, there were 36 corporate volunteer councils throughout the United States which reflects a growing interest in corporate volunteerism.[18]

PROJECTIONS FOR FUTURE INVOLVEMENTS

The outlook for future involvement by corporate volunteers in the 1990s is favorable. A major reason for this outlook is the aging of the "baby boomers" population. Seventy-seven million baby boomers will move into middle age during the nineties. Of these, 44 million will be in the 25-34 age group and 33 million will be in the 35-44 age group. Statistics indicate that individuals in these two age groups volunteer approximately 11% and 42%, respectively, more than the average adult.[19] This bodes well for corporate volunteerism as many of these people are part of the business community. These individuals are also establishing roots in their communities which will contribute to an increased interest in volunteering.

Another factor which will contribute to the participation of corporate volunteers in the 1990s is the recent change in attitude toward volunteerism by the American people. Some are predicting that the 1990s will be the "age of altruism."[20] Part of this change may be the result of President George Bush's "Points of Light Initiative" in which he is calling on all American and American institutions to volunteer. In this initiative, the President is calling on every business to 1) develop at least one community service project in which all employees are encouraged to participate; 2) consider volunteer service in hiring, compensation and promotion; and 3) donate services of some of its talented personnel to local volunteer organizations.[21]

The interest in corporate volunteer programs is expected to continue to increase in the future despite the worsening business conditions being experienced by corporations. As corporations have fewer resources to allocate to social service projects, they will substitute the talents of their employees by encouraging all personnel to participate in volunteer activities to help fulfill the corporation's responsibilities to society.[22]

RECOMMENDATIONS

Corporations must pay attention to how they "encourage" employee participation in volunteer activities. A recent study was conducted in the Minneapolis-St. Paul (Minnesota) area to examine the degree to

which corporations influence employee volunteer participation and what effect this influence had on the employees' satisfaction with their volunteer activities. Employees of 21 corporations were surveyed; 211 individuals responded. Of these respondents, 28% indicated that they experienced no influence to volunteer; 44.5% mild influence; 16.1% moderate influence and 6.2% severe influence. When asked whether the influence experienced affected their satisfaction with the volunteer activities, which certainly is of importance to the nonprofit agencies, 22.7% indicated a low level of satisfaction; 69.5% medium satisfaction and 7.8% high satisfaction. The study recommended that corporations evaluate their use of influence and reasons for doing so since employee satisfaction will ultimately affect the viability of the corporation's own volunteer program.[23]

This study also recommended that, in order to strengthen employee participation in, and satisfaction with, the corporate volunteer program, corporations acknowledge their employees volunteer participation by 1) recognizing the skills gained through the experience; 2) thanking employees for representing the company through corporate publications and personal contact with upper management; and 3) providing regular information to all employees regarding available volunteer activities, and allowing employees to participate in such activities during company time or offering some paid time off for these activities.[24]

In addition, as competition for the available workforce stiffens, corporations will have to pay closer attention to the needs of their employees in order to hire and retain them. One of these needs may be the ability to participate in volunteer activities. Since greater numbers of individuals are volunteering, a company with a corporate volunteer program will have an advantage over those that do not.

Like corporations, nonprofit agencies will face tough competition to get the number of future corporate volunteers needed. To enhance their ability to attract the needed volunteers, nonprofit agencies must take into account the varied work schedules of their potential corporate volunteers, and adjust their volunteer opportunities to accommodate those schedules. In addition, nonprofits need to address volunteers' growing reluctance to accept long-term positions and provide rewarding short-term volunteer opportunities.[25]

Nonprofit agencies must also take the time to learn what goals their volunteers have in regard to their volunteer activities. Ascertaining whether or not a person is satisfied with his or her assignment is important. Does the person want to participate in an activity that will utilize his or her current skills or want to learn new skills? Is the person's goal to use the skills gained through volunteer activities to assist in gaining employment? If so, records of that person's volunteer activities will be important.[26]

Finally, and probably most importantly, nonprofit agencies need to recognize the volunteers for their contributions to their organizations. Making sure that volunteers know that their work is appreciated will certainly enhance an organization's ability to retain and attract the volunteers needed for the future.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Kenn Allen, Shirley Keller & Cynthia Vizza, *A New Competitive Edge*, (Arlington: VOLUNTEER - The National Center, 1986), p. 4

[2]Susan J. Ellis & Katherine H. Noyes, *By the People*, (San Francisco; Jossey-Bass Inc., 1990), p. 59

[3]*ibid*, pp. 131-138

[4]Frank Koch, *The New Corporate Philanthropy*, (New York: Plenum Press, 1979), pp. 137-138

[5]Ellis & Noyes, *By the People*, p. 207

[6]*ibid*, pp. 202-205

[7]*ibid*, pp. 242

[8]Koch, *The New Corporate Philanthropy,* p. 103

[9]Ellis & Noyes, *By the People,* pp. 260-261

[10]*ibid,* pp. 268, 270

[11]Koch, *The New Corporate Philanthropy,* p. 4

[12]Allen, Keller & Vizza, *A New Competitive Edge,* pp. 63-64, 134

[13]*ibid,* p. 2

[14]Dan Cordtz, Corporate Citizenship: No more soft touches, *FW,* (May 29, 1990), p. 31

[15]Allen, Keller & Vizza, *A New compteitive Edge,* p. 2

[16]*ibid,* pp. 171-172

[17]CVC of the Minneapolis/St. Paul Metro Area, *Corporate Volunteerism 1986, A Report to the Community* (1986)

[18]Alvin R. Reiss, Executive Volunteers: The hidden workforce, *Management Review,* (November, 1989), p. 55

[19]Peter K. Francese, Heading Into the 1990s, *Fund Raising Management,* (May, 1989), pp. 27-28

[20]Barbara Kantrowitz, The New Volunteers, *Newsweek,* (July 10, 1989), p. 36

[21]William H. Miller, Corporations: "On" Switches for "Points of Light," *Industry Week,* (September 17, 1990), p. 64

[22]Dan Cordtz, Corporate Citizenship: No more soft touches, *FW,* (May 29, 1990), p. 32

[23]E. Levang, The existence of coercion in corporate voluntarism: An exploratory study, (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The Fielding Institute, Santa Barbara, CA), 1991

[24]*ibid*

[25]Ellis & Noyes, *By the People,* p. 362

[26]Minnesota Office on Volunteer Services, Volunteer for Minnesota, Recruiting Alternative Sources of Volunteers, (May, 1984), pp. 2-3

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