



Tapping Employees' Passions to Create High-impact Community Opportunities

BY SENOUR REED

Foster a culture that supports charity and volunteerism — then watch those personal relationships benefit your community, your employees, and your business.

TAKE STOCK

Look around the room. Take stock of the people on your team. They're experts at marketing, sales, operations, or information technology. Some are young account managers or project team members. Others are experienced leaders, managers, or executives.

But they're more than that. On their own time, they are also volunteers, charitable board members, and donors. They have causes they're passionate about, giving their time, talent, and treasure to support governments, education, charities, or professional organizations.

How much does your company tap into that part of your talent pool? Is your for-profit enterprise creating a corporate culture that promotes and supports the nonprofit interests of your employees? Because if you are, it can yield tantalizing benefits for your community, your workforce, and even your business.

BIG NUMBERS, BIG INFLUENCE

Consider Georgia alone. In 2009, Georgia had 39,174 registered nonprofits, up more than 25 percent since 2003. The total value of reporting nonprofit organizations was \$95.9 billion in 2009. Combined, they spent a total of \$43.1 billion — almost 11 percent of Georgia's gross state product in 2009.¹

Nonprofits generated about 512,000 jobs in Georgia, and more than \$22 billion in personal income. If it were classified as its own industry, it would rank 11th in terms of total employment, just after finance and insurance. And they're growing: the number of nonprofits in Georgia alone rose 30 percent in 10 years.

One might ask: Why the increase in nonprofits in these recent years? Some contend it's about a national

awakening of giving and caring that started around the turn of the century. Others contend it's about civic-minded for-profit leaders looking for ways to engage with their communities and their employees. Others believe it's all about causes bringing people and relationships together.

So how can the for-profit world help the nonprofit world connect people?

Perhaps the biggest way would be to focus on each person's "why." In Simon Sinek's powerful TED Talk on leadership, he examined the importance of starting with the "why." The "why" seems to leverage passion and create amazing results time after time. Keeping the "why" in mind as you navigate your planning around nonprofit engagement will serve you and your employees well.

It's through these "why's" that people come together for common causes. Make it about the "why." Let people choose the nonprofit cause they want to engage, one that matches their "why," one that ignites their passion. This is how to gain their professional volunteerism, leadership, and support.²

If your company has a corporate-wide community engagement program, and that helps employees spark their community "why," their passions would be further engaged. Through that passion, relationships with like-minded professionals are forged. When they are forged through passion, time, and service, the relationships are strong and lasting. You will see this in board rooms and on all types of committees: programming meetings, sponsorship drives, speaking engagements, awards-judging programs, membership functions, and the list grows, depending on which nonprofit you consider.



RELATIONSHIPS DRIVE SUCCESS

The point is, the “why” and the cause allow us to make new relationships in the nonprofit world.

Let’s look at a hypothetical example of a small for-profit company that leverages its desire to help its community yield relationships. The company believes their employees can be shepherds of their community-minded brand, while supporting their personal “why’s” around nonprofit giving. In the process of helping their employees engage, new relationships are forged. These new relationships can be with the staff of the nonprofit as well as the members of the nonprofit they serve as sponsors, speakers, volunteers, and board leaders.

As the journey continues year in and year out, the employees begin to connect the company’s clients and prospects with these nonprofits through invitations to events, speaker requests, board invitations, award nominations, and membership suggestions. Would these invitees appreciate the genuine care and passion from a company like this? You bet; in fact, a company receiving this type of activity on their behalf would benefit their companies greatly.

Would this activity serve a nonprofit well? Again, yes: It would spark the “why’s” and passions of new corporate citizens around the same good causes, and bring aboard new members and sponsors.

What if a company provided their services to a nonprofit for the purposes of helping that organization grow its membership and funding? Is this appreciated?



*Profits and nonprofits
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Yes, a nonprofit benefitting from these arrangements welcomes the chance to share how they helped with its membership, sponsors, and the community. Here again, a win-win-win for the community, the nonprofit, and the for-profit company.

Providing in-kind or pro-bono services to nonprofits can:

- Increase sponsorship funding and membership;
- Provide employee leadership development opportunities;
- Create relationships that provide ongoing opportunities;
- Showcase your good work to other connected civic leaders.

ALLOWING THE MAGIC TO HAPPEN

The point: The nonprofit world does offer extensive relationship building opportunities. When we give just to give and serve in the nonprofit world, good things seem to happen between for-profits and nonprofits; relationships develop that deliver commerce opportunities and results. All parties in the nonprofit serenade deserve some form of community engagement investment return.

How is this possible? Why would anyone consider it acceptable to mix the for-profit and nonprofit business goals in conversation? The reason is simple: All communities must have healthy economies and growing companies. Nonprofits need these same companies for their funding, leadership, and volunteerism.

Often, people on both sides of the board table aren't comfortable talking about nonprofit community engagement investment return. How could a profit-making company broach the topic of profit with a nonprofit cause? Often nonprofit leadership, staff, and volunteers aren't comfortable talking about a for-profit's goals, business development, and recruiting. Actually, both sides should welcome the discussion. It makes good sense; nonprofits should want great returns for their for-profit membership.

Once again, it's worth noting that for-profits and nonprofits are all about people connecting. And therein is the opportunity for discussion about what each other's company can do to help one another outside the nonprofit cause. Any relationship is a long-developing journey toward trust. Anyone who has served on a board or committee can recount the same story where trusted and meaningful relationships are derived from noble service.

Nonprofits and for-profits deserve equal value for their work together — though how we measure the value for each may differ. For-profits need nonprofits, so they can give of their employees and their companies and serve their communities. Nonprofits need profitable companies that give of their funding, employees, and offerings. It's all in front of us, once we know each other's "why," so community engagement and magic can be realized.



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REFERENCES

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