

# The Giving Generation

Agovino, Theresa . HRMagazine ; Alexandria Vol. 61, Iss. 7, (Sep 2016): 36-38,40,42,44.

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## ABSTRACT

Since the average employee age was 45, HR leaders decided it was time to bolster the company's benefits plan with features attractive to the ardently pursued younger technophiles, including student loan repayment and adoption benefits. According to the 2015 Millennial Impact Report, released by research company Achieve and sponsored by the Case Foundation, 70 percent of Millennial employees spent at least an hour volunteering in 2014, and 37 percent devoted up to 10 hours. In 2008, IBM initiated a program based on the Peace Corps that sends groups of employees to developing countries to partner with local startups, nonprofits and government officials to work on issues such as economic development, education and health care.

## FULL TEXT

### Headnote

Encouraging employees to make a difference can make all the difference to your business.

The 7,000 employees at Cadence Design Systems didn't need to see their company's name on Fortune magazine's most recent great places to work list to know they had it good. The salaries and perks were generous enough to keep about 40 percent of the staff happily in place for more than a decade—a remarkable retention rate for a company located in the hiring hotbed of Silicon Valley.

Still, the executives at Cadence, a San Jose, Calif.-based firm that designs semiconductors, realized that they needed to do more than just keep their current employees satisfied. They also had to engage the next generation of workers. Since the average employee age was 45, HR leaders decided it was time to bolster the company's benefits plan with features attractive to the ardently pursued younger technophiles, including student loan repayment and adoption benefits.

Another major carrot for luring younger workers came in the form of a reinvigorated corporate volunteer initiative, which gives employees five days of paid leave per year to volunteer at a charity of their choosing. The program earned Cadence a place on Fortune's 2016 list of best companies for giving back.

"Volunteering is at the top of Millennials' minds," says AnnaMarie Dunn, senior group director for human resources at Cadence. "Competition for talent is tough, and we are always thinking about ways to make employees happy."

Millennials, loosely defined as those born between 1980 and 2000, are among the most community-minded generations. According to the 2015 Millennial Impact Report, released by research company Achieve and sponsored by the Case Foundation, 70 percent of Millennial employees spent at least an hour volunteering in 2014, and 37 percent devoted up to 10 hours.

So it's not surprising that younger workers are motivated by jobs they find meaningful. A 2012 study by PricewaterhouseCoopers found that 88 percent of Millennials gravitated toward companies with pronounced

corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs and that 86 percent would consider leaving a job if the employer's CSR effort failed to meet their expectations.

That's crucial because the roughly 80 million Millennials are slated to make up half the workforce by 2020, according to Achieve's 2014 Millennial Impact Report.

And they tend to be a fickle bunch. One in 4 would have no qualms about quitting a job within a year if a new opportunity came up, according to the 2016 Deloitte Millennial Survey report. That figure swells to 44 percent when the time frame is expanded to two years.

"This is a group of employees that come to work with one foot out the door," says Jenny Lawson, executive director of the Points of Light Corporate Institute, which helps companies set up volunteer programs. "You have to work hard to make them stay."

That's one of the reasons corporate volunteer initiatives are becoming such a powerful recruitment and retention tool. Companies large and small are experimenting with offering a range of creative options to help employees find meaning and purpose at work that extends beyond their day-to-day responsibilities.

HR professionals have already largely bought into the idea. Eighty-eight percent of HR executives say volunteerism has a positive impact on an organization's reputation, according to the 2013 Deloitte Volunteer IMPACT Survey report, while 65 percent believe that employees benefit from sharper skills developed through volunteer opportunities. The biggest question HR pros have is how to design the best initiative to meet their company's needs.

There is a wide range of options. Some programs are expressly designed to hone workers' professional skills, while others allow employees to choose the projects that most inspire them. Both can be effective approaches for creating happy, productive and diverse workforces. The key to finding the right program lies in understanding your company's goals and creating an initiative that will be rewarding to those who participate.

### Choose Your Own Meaning

"We want the volunteer work to have meaning for the employee," Dunn says. Of all the generations, Millennials are especially concerned with maintaining a healthy work/life balance-or at least with smoothly integrating their personal and professional lives-and volunteering on company time helps them do that. "We don't do programs just for Millennials," she says. "But they are always top of mind."

Although the company's corporate volunteer program had been on the books for a while, it wasn't being used because the company had failed to publicize it. About a year ago, Dunn began working with Cadence's senior executives to promote the program via e-mail, posters and a series of employee information meetings. Managers were instructed to reassure staff that no adverse effects would come from taking advantage of the benefit. To the contrary, both workers and the company would gain from employees' doing so.

The push seems to be working. In 2015, about 65 percent of Cadence's 1,100 new hires were Millennials. That's an increase of several percentage points from 2014.

Smaller companies are finding ways to promote volunteerism as well. Almost all of the 55 employees at SSPR, a Chicago-based public relations firm, are from the Millennial generation. Loni Freeman, vice president of HR,

decided to roll out a volunteer initiative last year after observing that many of SSPR's workers were already involved in charity work. "The younger generation wants to work at a place they identify with personally," she says.

Each year, employees at SSPR receive eight paid hours off for group volunteer projects and 16 hours for individual pursuits.

Judging from the photos that employees have posted to their social media accounts about company-sponsored volunteer outings, Freeman believes SSPR's program is a success. "They seem proud of what they are doing," she says.

That's one reason the firm opted to steer clear of overtly linking volunteer projects to the development of professional skills. "We are showcasing who they are as individuals," Freeman explains. Plus, the company's goal was to give employees opportunities to have fun and create meaning on their own terms.

So far, the group option has been most popular, with teams of several people volunteering at animal shelters and a local Ronald McDonald House, Freeman says. That's not surprising: The 2015 Millennial Impact Report noted that 77 percent of those surveyed prefer volunteering with colleagues to working on independent service projects. It appears that Millennials value spending time with co-workers beyond traditional work interactions.

Two years ago, Katie Lamb was seeking ways to get better acquainted with her colleagues at Gregory FCA, a public relations firm in Philadelphia with about 60 employees. She thought a volunteer program would foster a more convivial office atmosphere. The head of the firm gave her the go-ahead, and she has planned excursions such as tending to a community garden, packing holiday gifts for military troops and playing with animals at a shelter. The plan has met her objective. "It makes going to work more friendly," says Lamb, an assistant account executive.

However, the green light for the program came with one condition: Excursions couldn't happen on company time. So they are scheduled for weekends or after work. "It's a business," Lamb says. "I understand."

### Getting from Giving

Yet other employers are coming to share the Millennial mindset that the line between work and community time need not be so sharply delineated. After all, the so-called soft skills- such as collaboration, empathy and communication-have become increasingly important in the workplace, and a broad range of volunteer efforts can provide opportunities to cultivate those abilities.

None of SSPR's projects have interfered with any vital client needs, Freeman says, and obviously a volunteer event would be canceled for a sudden business demand.

"Our first obligation is to our clients," she says. Many large global employers are going a step further and developing volunteer initiatives with clear connections to their corporate mission and leadership development goals. Adherents of this philosophy say it achieves the "triple crown" effect: The charity benefits from the free services, the employee gains useful career experience, and the employer builds a more seasoned workforce. It's a win-win-win.

"When our people participate in our programs, they are growing as professionals," says Deborah K. Holmes, the Americas director of corporate responsibility at EY, a global organization that provides tax, transaction and advisory services. "We are a business, and we run these programs because they make business sense."

EY has a variety of volunteer programs for its 65,000 U.S. employees, who represent about 30 percent of its worldwide workforce. Some of these programs allow younger folks a chance to develop and showcase their talents earlier in their careers than they otherwise would be able to, Holmes notes.

For example, younger professionals don't often have an opportunity to hone their leadership and public speaking skills by headlining large client presentations. But at EY, Millennials can teach a junior achievement class or be part of a mentoring team that gives lectures at high schools-activities that can help them learn to construct speeches and talk to large groups. This approach showcases how companies can tie community involvement with succession planning efforts, perhaps even integrating them with workers' professional development goals.

In 2009, EY developed a program that targets Millennials: EY Earthwatch Ambassadors. It sends teams of 10 people on weeklong assignments to help environmental nonprofits in developing countries to create better business and logistics systems.

Holmes says the program grew out of the company's desire to give Millennials international experience. The only other foreign volunteer assignment is to work as a solo consultant for six weeks-a stint that EY leadership believes is only appropriate for older, more seasoned executives.

International experience is crucial for ambitious young executives at corporations with worldwide client and staff bases, such as EY and tech giant IBM. In 2008, IBM initiated a program based on the Peace Corps that sends groups of employees to developing countries to partner with local startups, nonprofits and government officials to work on issues such as economic development, education and health care.

"You need a broad range of leadership skills in this economy," says Stan Litow, IBM's vice president of corporate culture and corporate affairs and president of the IBM International Foundation. "Millennials are hungry for programs like this."

Litow says the program is well-suited for Millennials because they enjoy working in teams. What's more, Millennial employees seek to do more than just perform perfunctory good deeds; they aspire to make a real difference. "They want to solve the problem," he explains. The program has attracted many young people to want to work at IBM, according to Litow.

Earlier this year, 26-year-old Jack Winstead, a managing consultant at IBM Cognitive Solutions, was part of a team that traveled to Ghana to work on education programs, including advising a local company on how to refine its plan to bring computers to girls in remote villages.

Winstead had volunteered overseas previously and founded a nonprofit that teaches children and young adults in India how to code. Going to Ghana was a way to further expand his horizons and gain leadership experience, he says.

Over the course of five weeks, Winstead had to not only learn about Ghana's customs, culture, lending environment and economy but also discern how his client, TechAide, would fit into the country's computer market. By the end of the project, the IBM team had created a detailed plan for TechAide to deliver computers to 400 schools.

"I can't tell you how many problems we needed to solve every day or even how we did it," Winstead says. "You just adapt."

He says the constant need to think fast and change course has sharpened his leadership skills. "It's one of the soft connections that are hard to make," he explains.

Ultimately, IBM will reap the benefits of his adventure. And, just as important to him, he will learn from his colleagues who have gone through that program or other skill-building exercises sponsored by IBM.

"I found a lot of people who really want to have an impact," Winstead says.

Indeed, whether companies opt to offer large global programs or small employee-driven passion projects, allowing employees to give back can give your company the edge when attempting to attract and retain the generation that will inherit the business.

### **Sidebar**

An employee at SSPR, a Chicago-based public relations firm, spends time with a canine friend as part of her volunteer work at the AntiCruelty Society.

A group of employees from Gregory FCA, a Philadelphia-based PR firm, volunteers with Cradles to Crayons, which provides supplies to low-income children.

#### **How to Start a Corporate Volunteer Program**

- \* Ensure that senior management is committed to the program and will communicate its support.
- \* Seek feedback from employees about the types of projects they would prefer and what causes are important to them. Employees may be reluctant to get involved if they regard the effort as a self-serving corporate gimmick.
- \* Be realistic about the amount of time and money the company can spend on the venture. Don't create a generous program only to realize the firm can't afford to dedicate the amount of resources necessary to maintain the effort.
- \* Understand your company's goals in rolling out a program, and develop offerings that enable it to meet those objectives.
- \* Provide employees with different options so they can find one that suits their schedule and interests.
- \* Promote the program through a variety of channels, including the company's website and posters in the office. Volunteer opportunities must be regularly publicized to become part of the company's culture.
- \* Create a mechanism to measure success. Survey employees about their experiences or have roundtable discussions to get feedback about how to improve the program.

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#### **Accountants Shouldn't Paint Fences**

Nonprofits get roughly \$127 more per hour when highly skilled professionals such as lawyers or software engineers offer their services pro bono than they would if those individuals performed basic tasks such as working in a soup kitchen or cleaning a playground.

Source: Taproot Foundation and the Committee Encouraging Corporate Philanthropy.

#### **If Your Goal Is To . . .**

Foster camaraderie and boost morale

Show that you value employees' individuality

Boost employees' professional skills

Maximize your impact

Offer noncommittal options to a time-crunched workforce

Consider . . .

A group outing that requires teamwork, such as building houses or planting trees.

Paid time off to pursue their passions alone or in groups.

Arranging for employees to offer their skills pro bono at a nonprofit that otherwise couldn't afford them.  
 Targeting the nonprofits that could benefit most from the unique skills your workforce offers.  
 Short "microvolunteering" opportunities that allow employees to use smartphones and computers to tutor a student via Skype or translate a blog post into Spanish during their lunch break.  
 IBM consultant Jack Winstead with a young woman in Ghana, where he traveled to advise a local company on how to bring computers to girls in remote villages.

### AuthorAffiliation

Theresa Agovino is a freelance business writer based in New York City.

## DETAILS

<b>Subject:</b>	Volunteers; Skills; Young adults; Design; Initiatives; Millennials; Social responsibility; Corporate culture; Employees; Workforce; Younger workers; Leadership; Professionals; Employers; Public relations
<b>Business indexing term:</b>	Subject: Social responsibility Corporate culture Employees Workforce Younger workers Leadership Professionals Employers
<b>Location:</b>	United States--US
<b>Classification:</b>	1220: Social trends & culture; 6100: Human resource planning; 9190: United States
<b>Publication title:</b>	HRMagazine; Alexandria
<b>Volume:</b>	61
<b>Issue:</b>	7
<b>Pages:</b>	36-38,40,42,44
<b>Number of pages:</b>	6
<b>Publication year:</b>	2016
<b>Publication date:</b>	Sep 2016
<b>Publisher:</b>	Society for Human Resource Management
<b>Place of publication:</b>	Alexandria
<b>Country of publication:</b>	United States, Alexandria
<b>Publication subject:</b>	Business And Economics--Management
<b>ISSN:</b>	10473149
<b>Source type:</b>	Trade Journal

**Language of publication:** English

**Document type:** Feature

**Document feature:** Photographs

**ProQuest document ID:** 1816791276

**Document URL:** <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/wgtn.ac.nz?url=https://www.proquest.com/trade-journals/giving-generation/docview/1816791276/se-2?accountid=14782>

**Copyright:** Copyright Society for Human Resource Management Sep 2016

**Last updated:** 2021-09-09

**Database:** ProQuest One Academic,ProQuest Central

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