Skills Learned Through Volunteering

If you are debating on whether you should take on a volunteer position, it is important to know that volunteer roles are equally valuable work experience that enables you to learn new skills. Simply because you are not being compensated, does not mean that your responsibilities, efforts and contributions go unnoticed and don’t carry the same value.

In this article, we will explore 5 skills that you can get to improve on when spending your time volunteering.

1. Working in a team

Whether you are volunteering at a hospital or at a publishing firm, chances are you will be placed in a department or group of people with whom you will get to interact with on a daily basis. This can be a valuable experience for many university students, especially the ones who are in a program that does not have many group projects, as it teaches them the foundation of working as a team. This means working with a common goal, placing the team’s interest above your own and always being willing to give a helpful hand. One thing interviewers usually ask about is your ability to work in a team. To assess this ability, they can throw you questions such as “Tell me about a time you had a conflict with a colleague”, or “Tell me about a time you overcame a challenge as a team, what did you do?”. By volunteering, you can gather some of these experiences, and be ready to share them in your next interview.
2. Communication

It goes without saying that one of the most desirable candidate characteristics nowadays is their communication skills. Communication skills are most important when handling the company’s clients, talking to managers and handling third parties. A candidate that possesses a good set of communication skills is comfortable talking to a variety of parties. Just like any other skill, communication can be improved upon. Maybe until now, you have only had to handle individual projects at school, and you never had the chance to actually challenge yourself and see how good your communication skills are. Here is when volunteering comes in. Volunteering at a place such as a university club, can teach you a lot about the importance of communication in a team setting and make you comfortable interacting with people of different backgrounds.

3. Leadership

Another skill that employers look for when reviewing a candidate’s application is whether they have had any leadership experience. Are they comfortable managing people and making decisions on the behalf of the entire team? Volunteering can provide you with this experience especially when you have been in one volunteer position for some time. As more senior volunteer, you may get to lead projects, get involved in the hiring and training of volunteers, and even allocate tasks. There is a range of experiences that you can build upon when taking on a volunteer position and a ton of things you can learn.
4. Work Ethic

If you haven’t had the chance to land an internship position or co-op placement yet, don’t worry about it! Volunteering can teach you just as much on the technical skills side and on the soft skills side. One of the great benefits of volunteering is that it teaches you how to have work ethic. Although you are willingly volunteering your free time, it does not mean that you may just come and go as you please. There are rules in place that you need to follow as there will be consequences if you don’t. If you resume is filled with volunteer positions throughout your university career, you can show your employer that you have the work ethic needed in order to be trusted. The experience can show that you have demonstrated responsibility and accountability in the past, which employers are looking for.

5. Problem-Solving

Wherever you work, no matter the type of job you do, there will always be problems that need to be solved. Employers target candidates that possess a good set of problem-solving skills, candidates who are resilient in the face of adversity and know how to handle an unexpected situation. Just as in the workplace, problems can arise in the place where you volunteer as well, giving you an opportunity to take the lead and practice your problem-solving skills. You are able to work on out-of-the-box thinking and learn how to professionally handle mishappenings.
Above everything else, gathering these skills through volunteering gives you confidence. You become confident that you will do a good job in the position you are applying for, confident that you possess the skills required and confident in your own experience. Confidence can be a huge determining factor when you showcase your abilities in an interview. So don’t waste time! Apply to a volunteer position!