

Why don't more companies do volunteer work?

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Employee loyalty and improved reputation are two advantages of corporate volunteer work. So, why is its presence in companies is still scant?

In Spain, more than a million people work as volunteers for charitable organizations. What's more, Spain established a State Plan for Volunteer Work in 2005-2009, run by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, which has developed several areas of public awareness, support and coordination of the various entities involved in this kind of work.

In the business sector, volunteer work is still a fledgling phenomenon. However, more and more companies are concerned about the real problems and needs of people in the society around them, and thus have embarked on charitable initiatives.

The Corporate Volunteer Work Observatory, a program launched by IESE and the NGO Cooperación Internacional, has sponsored the [Report on Corporate Volunteer Work in Spain in 2009](#). Its goal is to raise awareness of the value and importance of doing volunteer work and to get more companies involved as a demonstration of their social commitment.

The study looks at the volunteer work carried out by workers in sectors as diverse as banking, food, construction, media and chemicals, in order to determine the most relevant aspects of carrying out work of this nature.

What is corporate volunteer work?

Corporate volunteer work refers to a set of general-interest activities that have no commercial or for-profit purposes, carried out under the umbrella of the company for which the volunteer works.

Among companies of more than 500 employees, the report found that 70 percent of them carried out some corporate volunteer work, up 10 percent from 2008. Unsurprisingly, the cities with the most corporate volunteer work are Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia and Seville, which are also the provincial capitals where most businesses and industries are concentrated.

Companies cite various reasons for not engaging in volunteer work, ranging from "never thought of it" and "other priorities" that preclude involvement, to a general lack of awareness, resources or time. Some 4 percent simply felt it wasn't necessary.

Advantages for companies

These firms might reconsider their stance when they learn of its advantages, with 38 percent reporting that it generated a strong sense of pride and belonging among workers. Nearly 35 percent said that joining together with colleagues in volunteer tasks had helped them overcome differences.

Around a quarter said they judged a company's social contribution when taking decisions related to their career paths — an important consideration for companies to retain talent.

In designing a volunteer program for a company, one of the most important factors to bear in mind is which group of people will be served. The groups that seem to motivate employees most are youth and children, people with disabilities and senior citizens.

Planning and development

As with any other activity carried out by a company, volunteer work requires a strategy and planning, although in most companies, it is not clear which department is responsible: communications, human resources or CSR units.

As for the management model, in over half the cases, organizing this type of work is shared between the company and the charity partner. In over 90 percent of the cases, it is the workers themselves who develop their own initiatives, which is good, as it demonstrates a

higher degree of involvement, commitment and ownership.

Many companies do monitor and assess these schemes, with 79 percent evaluating employee satisfaction levels, and 60 percent doing the same with the charity with which they are affiliated.

None of the companies studied for this report had anything negative to say about this kind of work. On the contrary, 51 percent called their experience satisfactory, and 49 percent deemed it excellent. This shows that companies give volunteer work very high marks indeed.

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