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Volunteering with coworkers brings benefits back to the workplace

By JEN BRENNAN



Photo by CONTRIBUTED PHOTO Jen Brennan is an interior designer at Bialosky Cleveland.

As new generations enter the workplace, company cultures have started to shift. Organizations are integrating more soft skills, such as team building and volunteering opportunities. Not only does this work to improve the community, but it turns out investing in these employee experiences can bring clear benefits back to the office. As one of those darn millennials you keep hearing about, I, too, placed great importance on joining a company that values working with your team to make a positive impact in your community.

Strengthening bonds

Branching out from your typical 9-5 work environment with your coworkers to participate in community service opportunities can greatly improve employee relationships. Am I saying that afterward everyone will stand in a circle and sing “Kumbaya”? Probably not. However, teaming up with coworkers outside of the office can strengthen interpersonal bonds and reinforce the “all-hands-on-deck” mentality needed for success. Additionally, for mid-size to large companies, team volunteering allows coworkers who do not regularly work together to be a part of the same team and build rapport.

New leaders emerge

Shortly after I started at Bialosky, I was fortunate enough to become team captain for a unique event that we annually participate in called Canstruction Cleveland. Canstruction is a nonprofit organization that hosts a national, charitable competition where teams create structures built entirely of canned goods, which are then donated to local food banks. This event requires a large team and a lot of coordination. Being fresh out of college, I had limited managerial experience but was eager to take on this leadership role. Young professionals often enter the workforce ready to evoke change and tackle ambitious roles, but lack the training and experience. While it may take time to climb the corporate ladder, taking initiative and activating your workplace in volunteer opportunities allows young professionals to lead teams early in their careers, before they typically do in the workplace, priming them to be effective future project managers.

Dissolving hierarchies

Volunteer settings allow coworkers to build on their relationships outside of the natural corporate hierarchies. Volunteer activities create opportunities for employees of varying professional levels and different departments to get to know each other on a more personal level, building a sense of camaraderie that carries back to the office. Stacking cans next to a principal during the Canstruction event, or cheering on a diverse team of colleagues at a kickball game, allows coworkers to connect outside of their titles and builds trust and teamwork in an egalitarian way.

Whether it be a participating in a volunteer event or starting an office sports team, working together in a variety of settings fosters better relationships and increases team performance in the office. Young professionals can take advantage of opportunities to dip their toes in the leadership pool but they are not the only ones that benefit from these activities. By integrating team events, senior management can get to know their team better, actively invest in future leaders, and promote a company culture that boosts morale, as well as attract and retain talent. It’s true what they say: Teams that play together, stay together.

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